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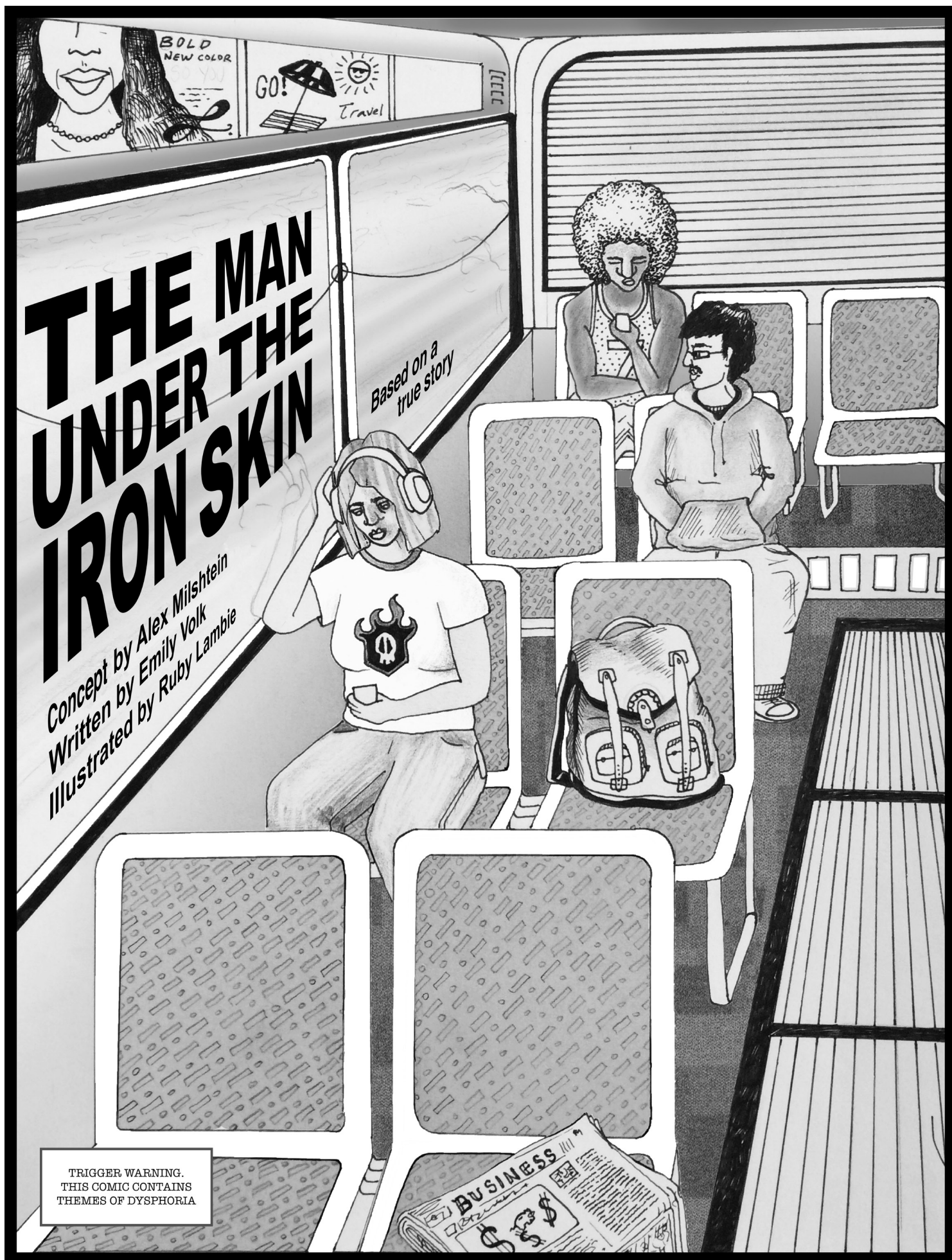
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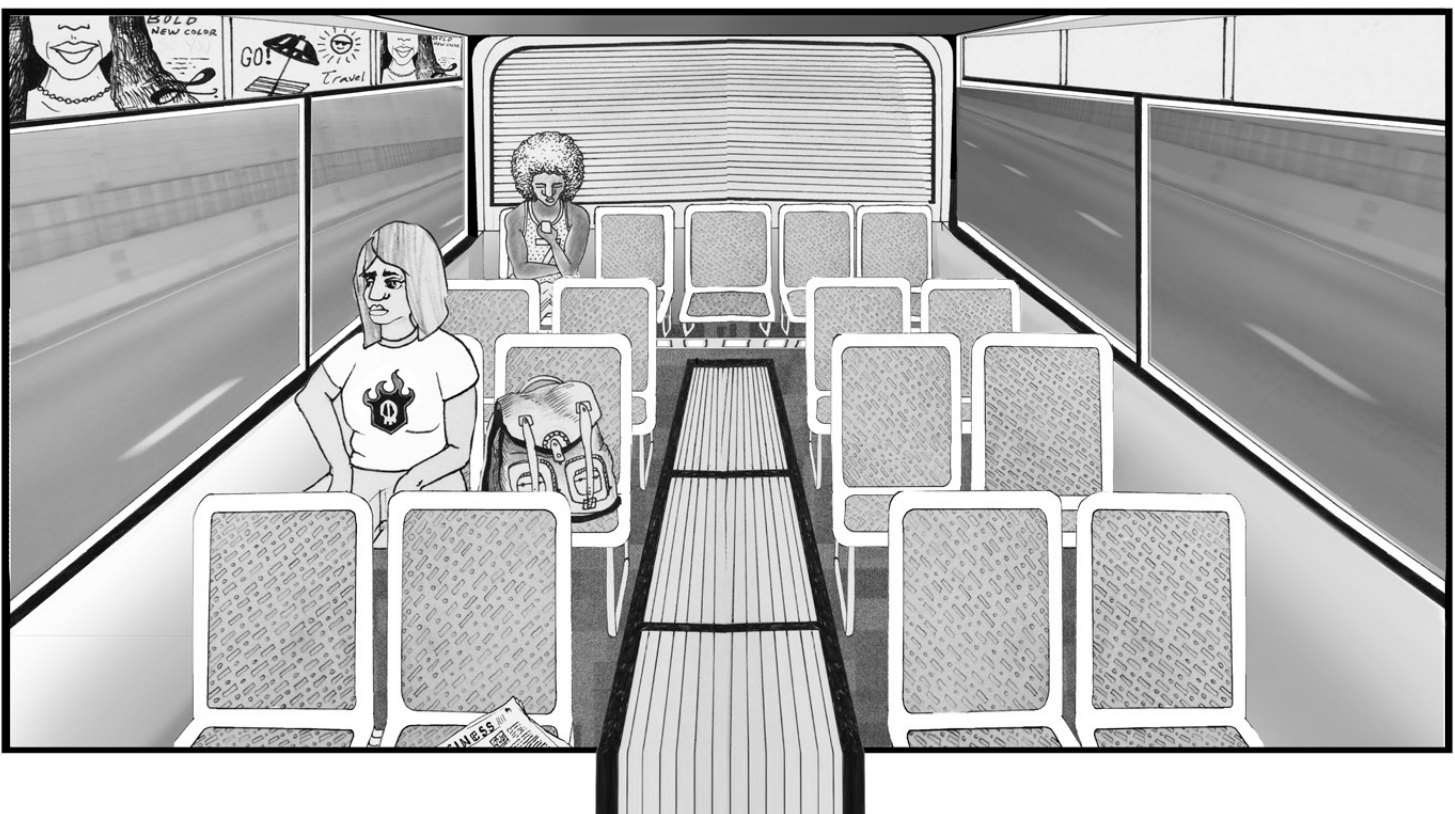
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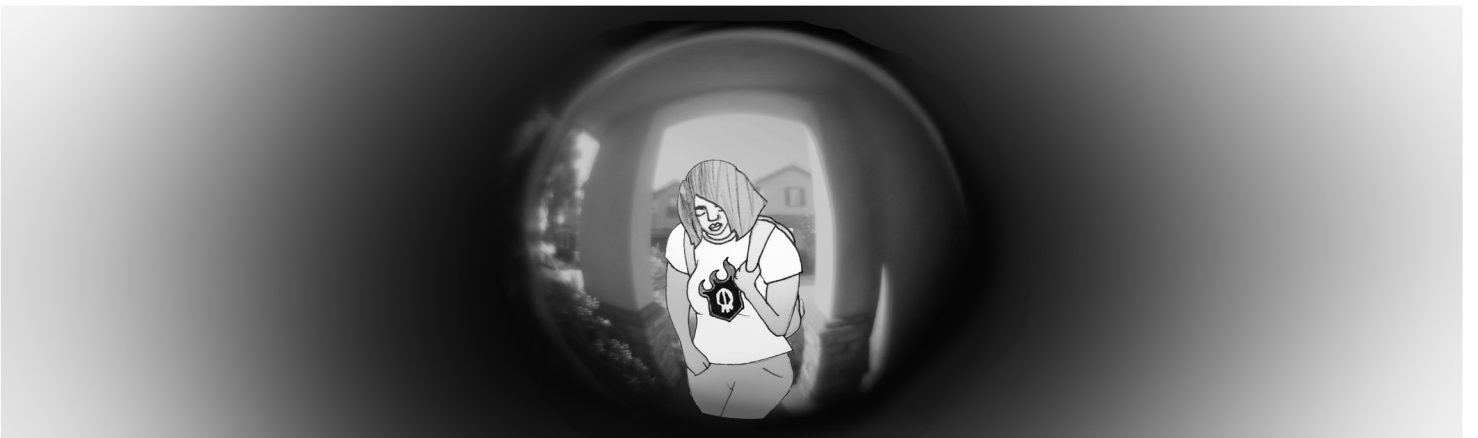
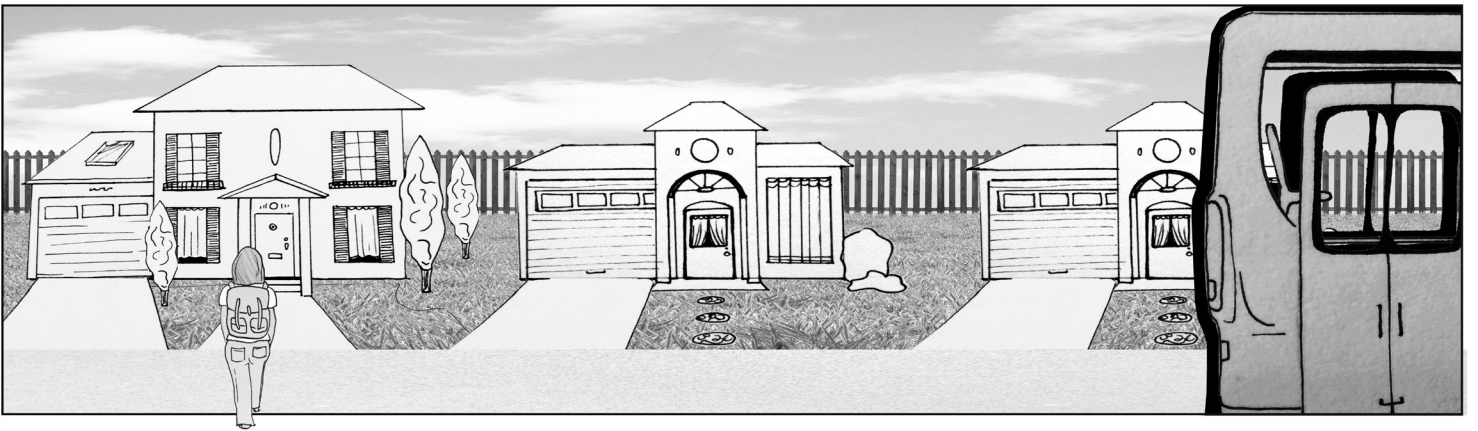
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TRIGGER WARNING.
THIS COMIC CONTAINS
THEMES OF DYSPHORIA



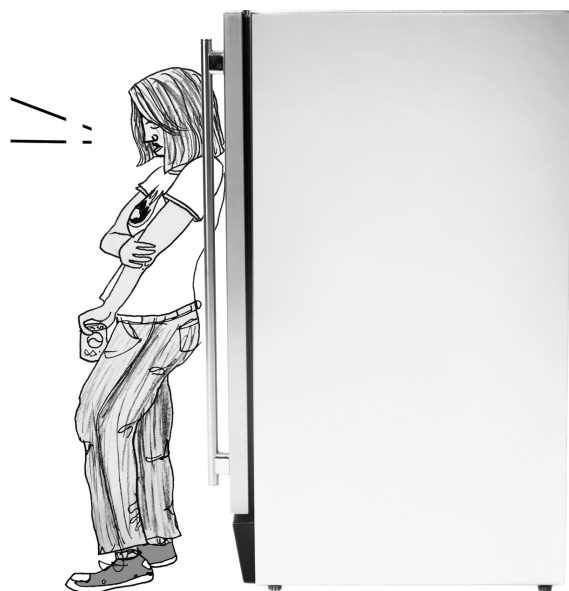




JOANNA,
IS THAT YOU?
COM'ERE, HUN



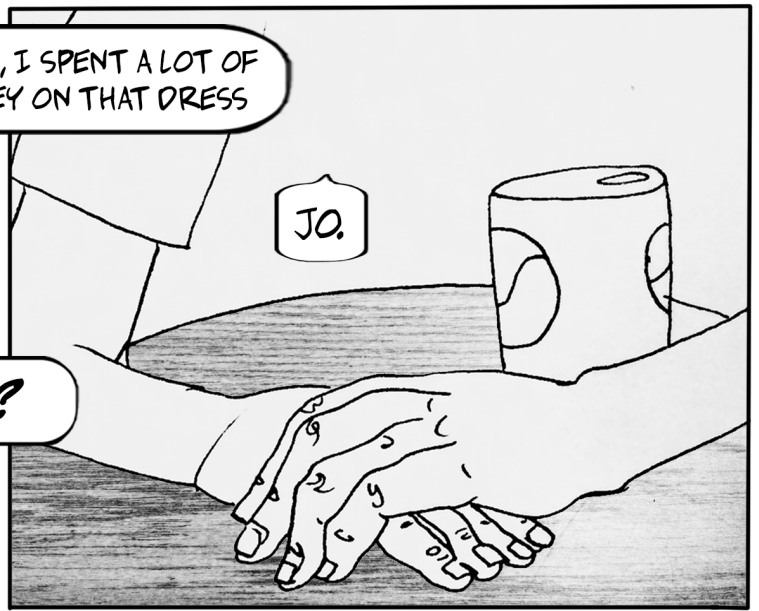
A TUX.
I WANT TO WEAR A TUX TO PROM





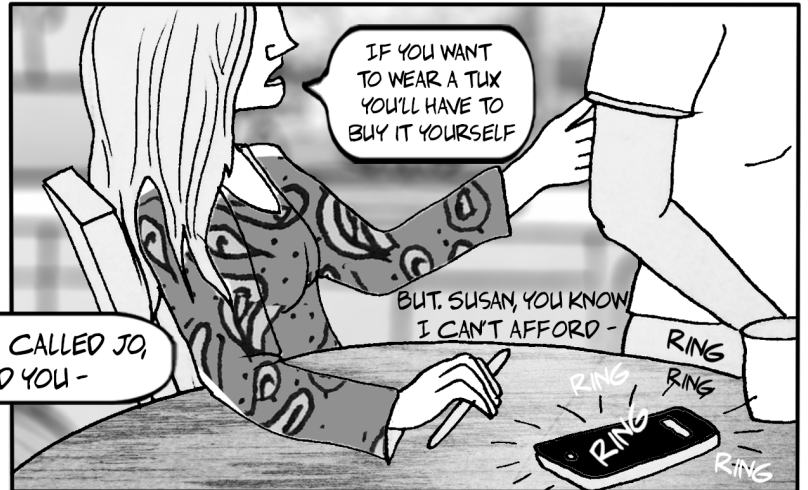
JOANNA, I SPENT A LOT OF MONEY ON THAT DRESS

HUH?



JO...

I WANT TO BE CALLED JO,
I'VE TOLD YOU -



IF YOU WANT
TO WEAR A TUX
YOU'LL HAVE TO
BUY IT YOURSELF

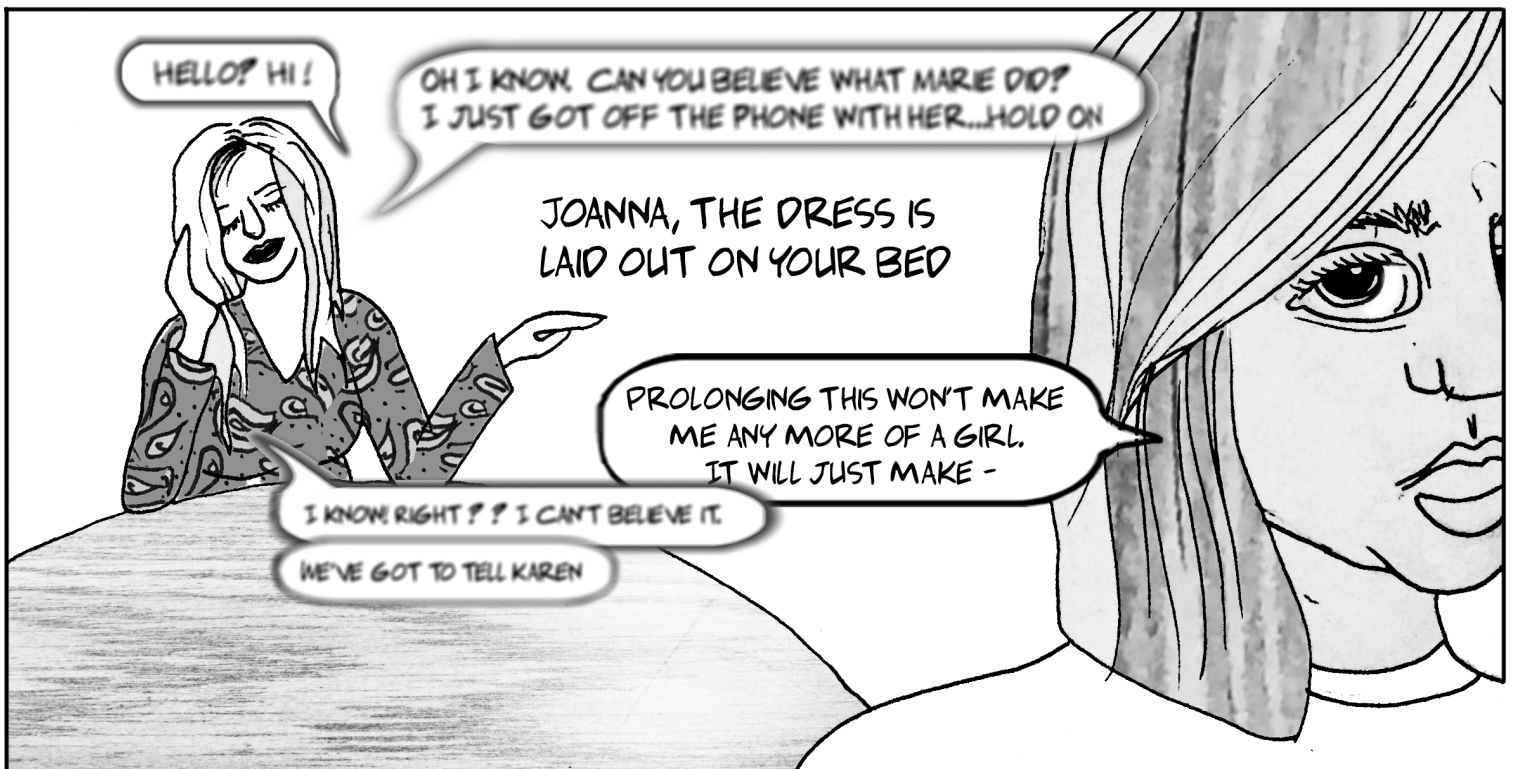
BUT, SUSAN, YOU KNOW
I CAN'T AFFORD -

RING

RING

RING

RING



HELLO? HI!

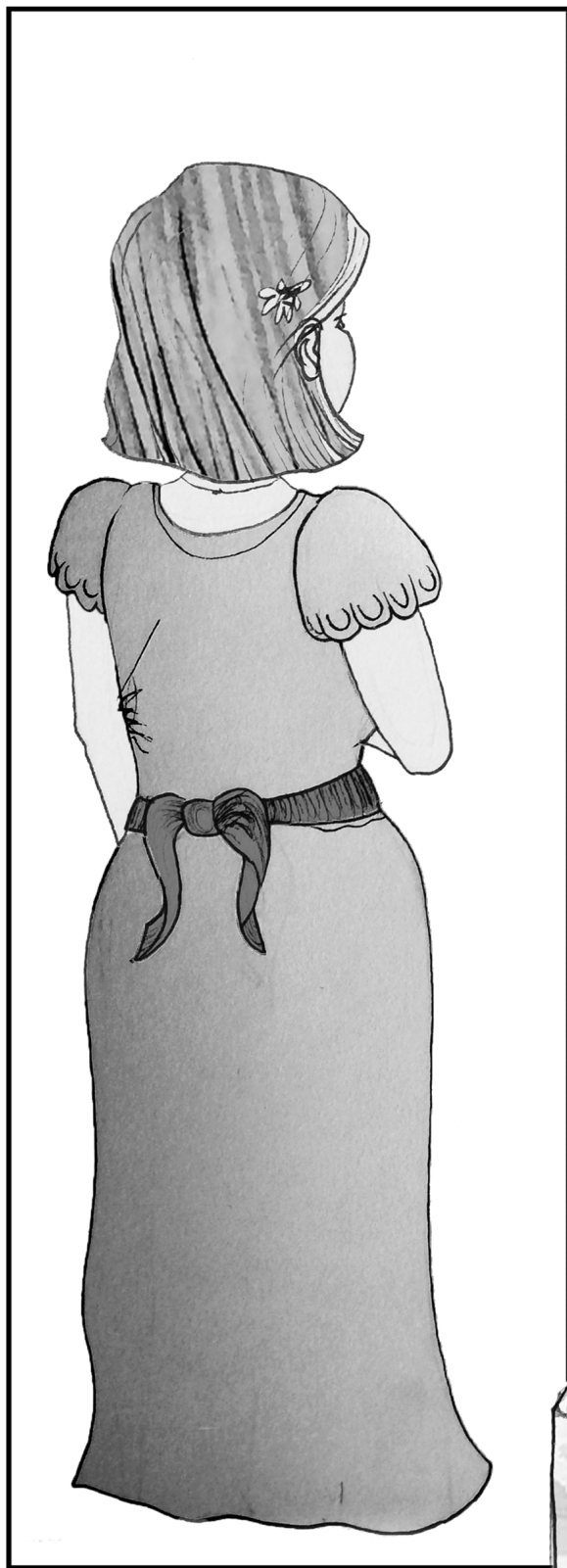
OH I KNOW, CAN YOU BELIEVE WHAT MARE DID?
I JUST GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH HER...HOLD ON

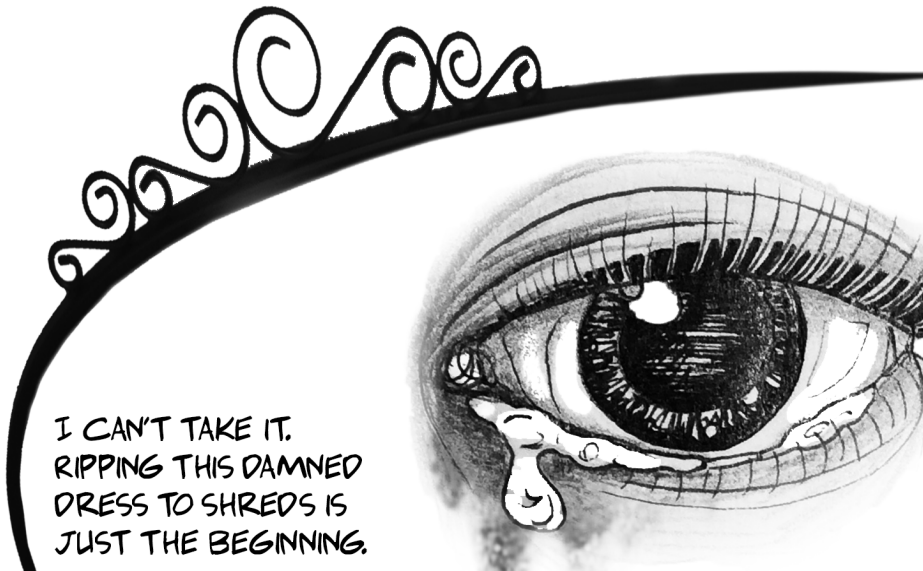
JOANNA, THE DRESS IS
LAID OUT ON YOUR BED

PROLONGING THIS WON'T MAKE
ME ANY MORE OF A GIRL.
IT WILL JUST MAKE -

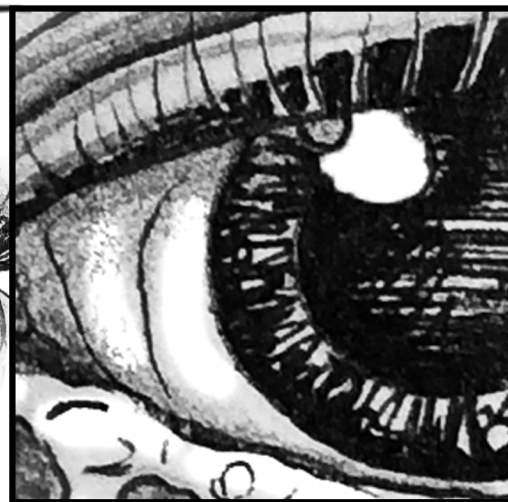
I KNOW RIGHT?? I CAN'T BELIEVE IT

WE'VE GOT TO TELL KAREN





I CAN'T TAKE IT.
RIPPING THIS DAMNED
DRESS TO SHREDS IS
JUST THE BEGINNING.



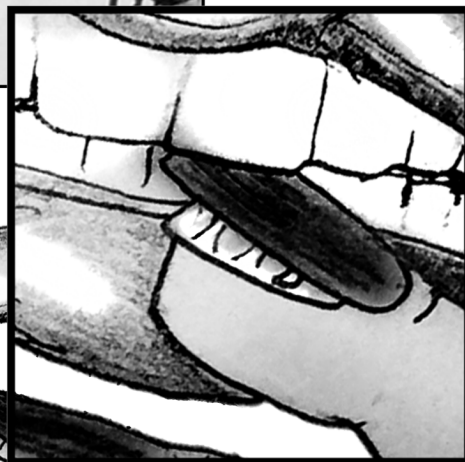
I CAN'T BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE NEXT STEPS ARE GOING
TO BE LIKE FOR ME. I WILL LOSE FRIENDS. I WILL LOSE THE LOVE
AND SUPPORT OF MOST OF MY FAMILY MEMBERS.



ALL BECAUSE
THEY CAN'T
UNDERSTAND



I AM A MAN TRAPPED IN A WOMAN'S BODY.



SO I PERSIST.

AND IT HURTS
LIKE HELL..



... BUT AT LEAST I AM FREE

UNSPEAKABLE WORDS AND IMAGES

PRIMORDIAL LANGUAGE AND COSMIC HORROR IN ALAN MOORE'S "THE COURTYARD" AND NEONOMICON

By Bjorn Smars

H.P. Lovecraft begins his seminal essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature" with the oft-cited quote, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." This theme of primordial fear predominates most, if not all, of Lovecraft's fiction. The horror in Lovecraft's fiction is cosmic in nature; that is, his stories suggest that what is unknown or unknowable should remain that way, that our very fear of the unknown is what keeps us sane and human, as though knowledge itself threatens to unravel us at the seams. Lovecraft's universe is made up of things that the human mind cannot and should not comprehend, not just the existence of malign alien beings that have the capacity to destroy all of reality, but forces of primordial language and theoretical mathematics that, if accessed, allow one to glimpse the very fabric and inner workings of the universe.

It is this theme of cosmic horror that Alan Moore and Jacen Burrows explore in their Lovecraftian graphic novel *Neonomicon* and its short prelude, "The Courtyard." Inspired by and filled with references to the works of Lovecraft and some of his contemporaries, "The Courtyard" tells the story of Aldo Sax, a racist federal agent who, while on an undercover assignment, investigates a series of identical ritual murders committed by three people who share no apparent connection. The course of Sax's investigation leads him to a nightclub where he learns of a drug called "aklo", sold by a man named Johnny Carcosa who has a lisp and wears a yellow veil over his mouth. Sax meets with Carcosa at the latter's apartment building where he is given a white powder to snort. Sax quickly identifies the powder as a mild hallucinogenic designed to prepare him to receive the "aklo." Carcosa whispers a few words of an unknown language (the "aklo") into Sax's ear which

causes Sax to experience vivid hallucinations of horrific monsters and the spectral planes they inhabit. These hallucinations drive Sax into a homicidal madness, and he proceeds to kill two people in similar fashion to the ritual murders at the center of his investigation.

Although both stories contain "classical" horror themes and elements, it is Moore and Burrows's project of translating Lovecraft's cosmic horror from an exclusively prose medium to the comics medium that I find most intriguing. To put it mildly, representing themes of cosmic horror in a visual medium is an exceedingly difficult task. This is especially true with most film adaptations of Lovecraft's stories, which fall short of being "truly" horrifying and are instead laughably campy. Lovecraft rarely gave detailed descriptions of his monsters, and those he did cannot be easily imagined. However, it is not the monsters themselves but the things that afford us glimpses into the universe's dark heart that are the quintessence of Lovecraftian

"However, it is not the monsters themselves but the things that afford us glimpses into the universe's dark heart that are the quintessence of Lovecraftian cosmic horror."

cosmic horror. In the case of "The Courtyard" and *Neonomicon*, it is the language Lovecraft invented, and more specifically its effect on the

form of the story, that allows the characters—and by extension us as readers—this glimpse. There are two ways I wish to talk about how Burrows and Moore experiment with the comics form in "The Courtyard" and, to a lesser extent in *Neonomicon*, for the purpose of emphasizing the "cosmic horror" of the text. The first thing I will look at is how changes to the color palette¹ may emphasize various modes of perception; the second is the various ways the novel represents time visually.

1 The author would like to note that "The Courtyard" was originally published in 2004 in black-and-white; a full color version was not released until 2009. *Neonomicon* includes the full-color version of "The Courtyard."

The hallucinations Sax experiences at the climax of “The Courtyard” and the preceding panels offer an interesting perspective into how Burrows’ art represents Sax’s—and by proxy, the audience’s—perception of reality within the text. Sax’s perception of reality changes in the panels after he snorts the white powder as seen in fig. 1. In the first panel Sax sits on the bed in Carcosa’s room and consumes the powder. The next panel features a close-up of Sax’s face and torso; he sits in the same position, but the background has changed. Instead of a wall with pictures



fig. 1

hanging up behind him, a circular grid stretches out behind Sax’s head from an unseen focal point near the center of his forehead. Five paint brush strokes are in an ascending clockwise direction out from the focal point. In the next panel Sax opens his eyes and the grid disappears to be replaced once again by Carcosa’s room. However, the room and everything in

it has been washed of color and the next four panels are represented completely in shades of gray.

The change of color in these four panels can be read in at least two ways. On the one hand, this grayscale could be read as an actual change in the way Sax perceives the world in his drugged state. Although we do not see the world through his eyes, given that our own gaze is usually focused on Sax rather than through him, our visual experience is changed by his bodily experience. Alternatively, we can read this change not as a literal shift in Sax’s perception, but as a shift in the comic form that is meant to emphasize the otherworldliness of his hallucinations, as though the colors we can perceive in the world are as dull as grayscale when compared to the colors and images of Sax’s hallucinations. In other words, the colors of his hallucinations may be colors inconceivable to human perception. The shift to grayscale may therefore be the best formal way for the comics form to represent and emphasize the difference between the colors of Sax’s hallucinations and those of the “real world.” Without the shift to grayscale, the images of Sax’s hallucinations may be jarring to the reader in terms of content; but the shift in color serves to heighten that difference in experience.

In addition to the color shift, Burrows’ art plays with the comic form’s representation of time in both “The Courtyard” and Neonomicon. However, where “The Courtyard” is more experimental on a formal level, Neonomicon has very little formal experimentation but provides a thesis, so to speak, and a narrative explanation for the texts’ experimental representations of time and reality. Toward the end of Neonomicon, Agent Merrill Brears—the main protagonist of the Neonomicon and one of the two FBI agents investigating Sax’s case—meets with the incarcerated Sax to talk about her kidnapping and week-long incarceration in a watery dungeon at the hands of a Dagon-worshipping sex cult and the rape(s) she was forced to endure at the hands of a half-man, half-fish monster known as a Deep One in Lovecraft’s fiction. During their conversation, Brears reveals her experience with the Dagon cult and the Deep One has fundamentally changed her perception of reality: “the world, it’s not how people see it, right? And time’s different too. That’s what took me longest to figure out, how the Great Old Ones ‘were, are and shall be.’ It’s a different view of time, isn’t it? It doesn’t distinguish between past, present, and future.”

This explanation of time is literally illustrated two panels later when Brears claims that, although most don't realize it, all humans exist on the Plateau of Leng—one of Lovecraft's fictional dimensional planes where multiple realities converge. Visually, as seen in fig.2, Brears and Sax are no longer in the psychiatric hospital, though they remain in a seated position on invisible chairs. Instead, they are both naked on a flat, brown plane with a maroon sky and small dark green oval splotches floating around in the air. Stretched behind them are two sequences of seemingly infinite copies of their bodies which blend with and overlap one another. Each copy represents the space their bodies occupied at any and all given moments in time leading up to the present moment. Sax's description of Leng offers an explanation for body sequences; he says Leng is not "high ground in the normal sense" but is a projection into "a higher mathematical space." But perhaps it's incorrect or misleading to say that these two panels "experiment" with representations of time. It would certainly be wrong to say that the body sequences are unique to the comics form since many films have performed similar effects. Rather, what this thesis of time and these two panels do is offer a narrative explanation of Burrows' experimentation with form in "The Courtyard."



fig. 2

Each image of Sax's hallucinations in "The Courtyard" is represented in horrific detail on a two-page splash page. For the sake of space and clarity, I must refrain from an in-depth analysis of each of these spreads because to do so sufficiently would require significantly more pages; instead, I will refer to the specific aspects of the page layout as seen in fig.3 that are relevant to this discussion. (I encourage you to seek out a copy of Neonomicon or "The Courtyard" to fully appreciate each spread.) The intricate detail in the artwork encourages the reader to linger on the image and to soak in the immensity of each hallucination. Sax's internal narration continues over all three hallucinations, but splits into separate text boxes spaced out on the page at irregular intervals. This spacing forces the reader's eye to move from one place on the page to another, thereby disrupting and slowing

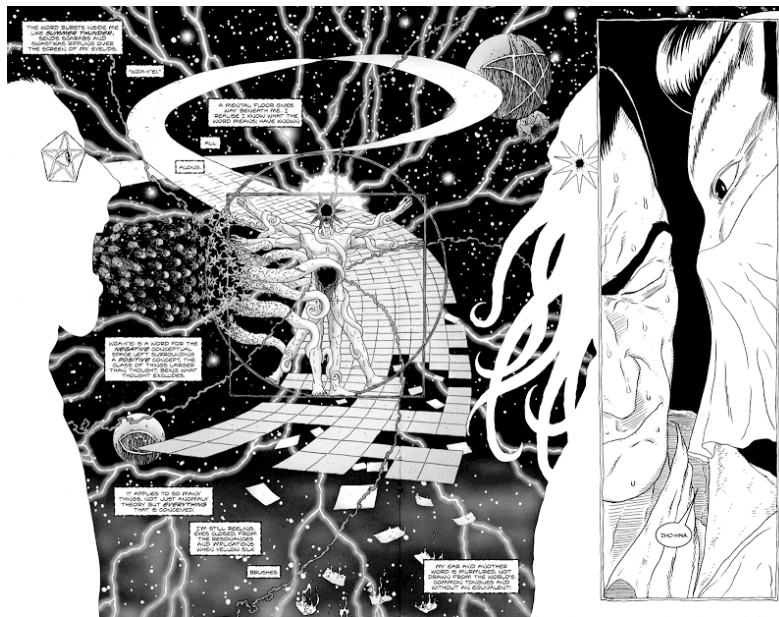


fig. 3

the reading, however marginally, while at the same time drawing their eye back to the detail in Burrows' art. In the first hallucination (see fig.3) specific words are afforded their own text box, thereby lending each of those words significance, as though an invisible ellipsis exists in the spaces between each box. In the final hallucination (see fig.4) this effect is amplified to where there is very little narration and the text boxes of Sax's final sentence seem to fall from the top of the page, signifying Sax's own descent into madness.

What is not clearly represented in the artwork is how long each hallucination lasts within the narrative universe. To Sax each hallucination may either last an eternity or no longer than the moment it takes for Carcosa to take a breath, speak the next word, and trigger the next hallucination. There is simply no way of gauging the length of time. Heretofore, time has been represented within the confines of panels. A lack of panel borders, therefore, suggests time is either irrelevant or—as Brears's thesis of time

suggests—indistinguishable.

Regardless of how long the hallucinations last, what is made clear to the attentive reader in the pages following is that somehow Sax's perception of time has changed or unraveled, thereby revealing the construct beneath. The four panels that follow after the hallucination scenes each contain a small snapshot of the previous page or panel hidden somewhere on the page. In the first panel Sax is still sitting on Carcosa's bed while Carcosa sits in a chair across from him. Hidden in one of the picture frames is the image of Sax's final hallucination. In the next panel, a tiny facsimile of the previous panel can be seen in one of the window panes behind the stairs that Sax descends, an effect that continues until the final four panels of "The Courtyard."

During these panels Sax explains, "[e]vents have a new continuity now. Disassociate clusters of data in pregnant, post-linear arrays. My first steps up the tenement stairs are embedded in those taken now to depart." The circularity of time suggested in this sentence not only refers to the post-hallucination panels, but also to the narrative structure of "The Courtyard" as a whole. In these panels, Sax returns to his apartment by walking the streets he took early in the story. Additionally, the final four panels of the comic mirror those at the beginning of the comic. All eight panels are identical and feature Sax staring intently at something in his hands just outside of the panel frame. In the full-color version of the comic, Sax is illuminated by a different color of light from the fireworks shooting off outside his window. The final four panels mirror the first four in every way, except that Sax is covered in blood at the end. Sax's journey in "The Courtyard" ends where it started, and even though he's technically "solved" his case, he's tainted by it and becomes complicit in its horrors.

The idea that time and reality are merely constructs that only those who have glimpsed beyond and been driven mad by the revelation is a central theme in a lot of cosmic horror, but especially in Lovecraft's fiction. The true achievement of *Neonomicon*, in my opinion, is how well Moore and Burrows are able to incorporate this theme into not only the structure of the narrative, but also into the comics medium itself via the artistic techniques discussed in this essay. The most terrifying thing about *Neonomicon* and cosmic horror in general is not the horrific hallucinations in "The Courtyard" or

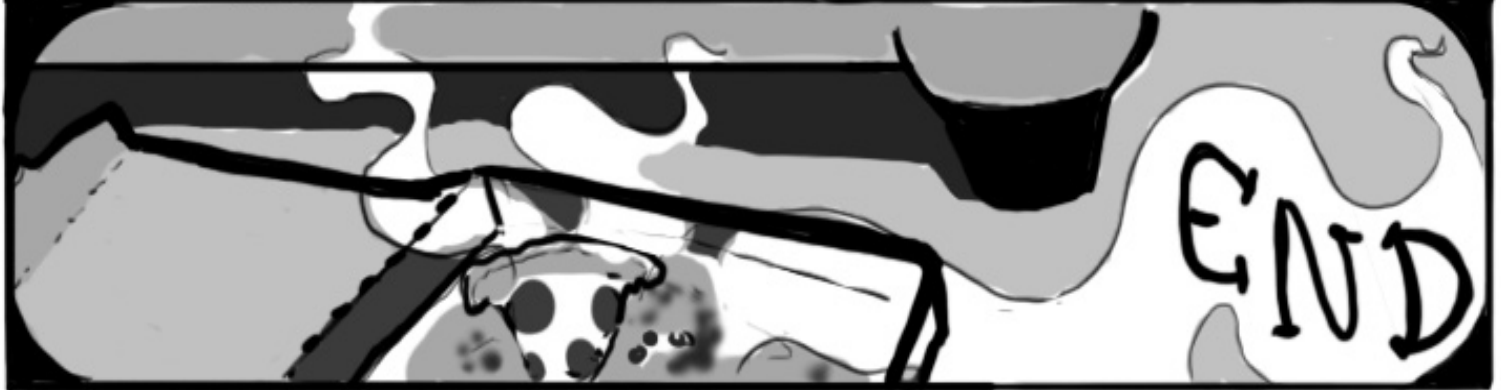
even the monstrosity of the Dagon sex-cult. The things I find most terrifying are the questions that I'm left with. What if Moore, Burrows, and Lovecraft are right? What if the reality we perceive is nothing more than a thin veil masking some malevolent chaos or primordial evil? Is our fear of the unknown the only thing standing between us and homicidal insanity? Like cavemen, perhaps it's best for us to sit huddled around our small fire making stories about the flickering shadows cast on the wall than to venture outside into the dark and stormy night where anyone or anything could be waiting.



fig. 4

Post-script: It is worth noting that Moore and Burrows are not yet done with Lovecraft. Avatar Press, the same publisher that produced Neonomicon, is currently releasing in single issues Moore and Burrows' new foray into Lovecraftian horror, a twelve-part series titled Providence. At the time of this writing issue number six is the latest published with issue number seven set to be released sometime in February, 2016. By all accounts, the book is as intricately detailed and nuanced as its predecessor, and, according to Avatar Press's website, has been heralded by fans as the "Watchmen of horror" and as a "masterpiece." If you ask me that's quite the endorsement.





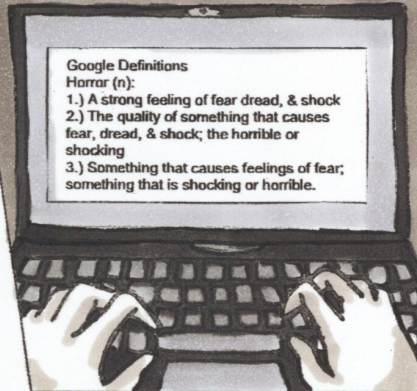
From Within the Vault of Horror



What is
"horror?"

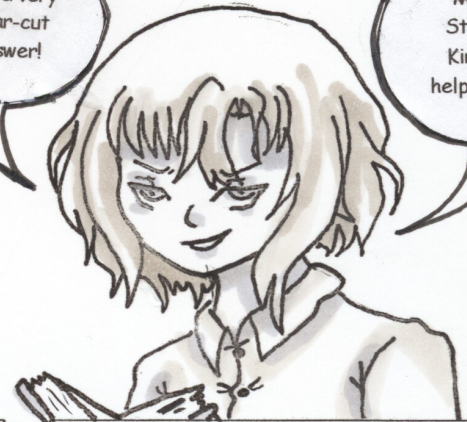


Search it online...



Not a very
clear-cut
answer!

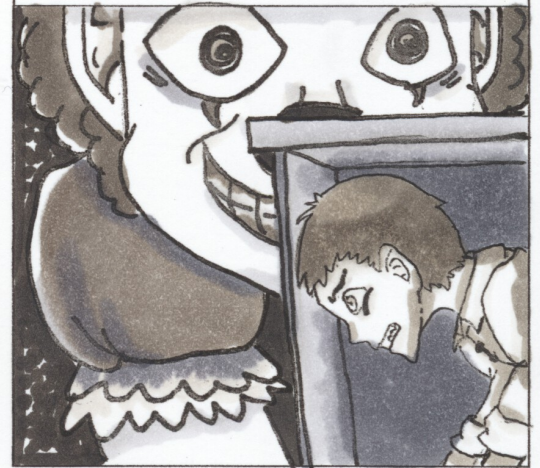
Maybe
Stephen
King can
help us out?



Stephen King defines horror through
two components: "gross-out" and
"phobic pressure points."



Basically, horror comes from physical
repulsion to innate or personal fears.



That's pretty good. But
what do more academic
sources say?

According to the *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, **horror** is something that
"confronts the principal characters with the
gross violence of physical or physiological
dissolution, explicitly shattering the assumed
norms of everyday life with wildly shocking,
and even revolting consequences."

This is scarier
than everything
I've written

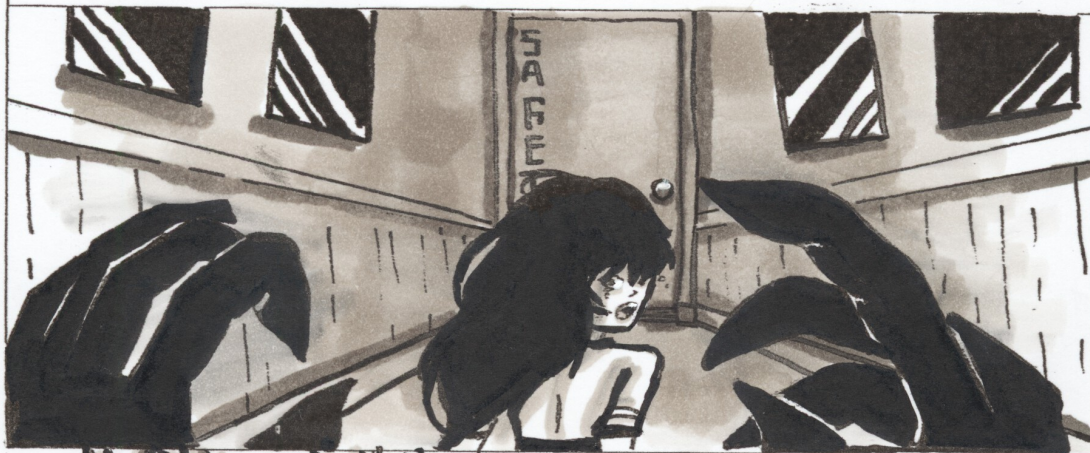


I'm still pretty,
right?

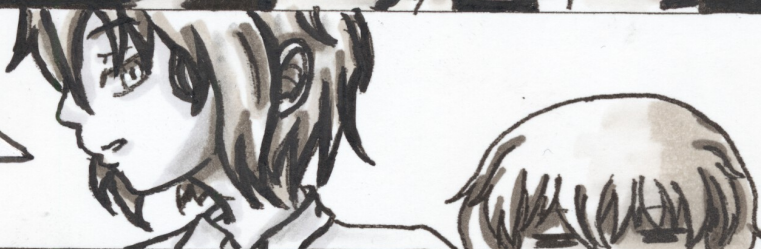


But terror is
defined a
little
differently...

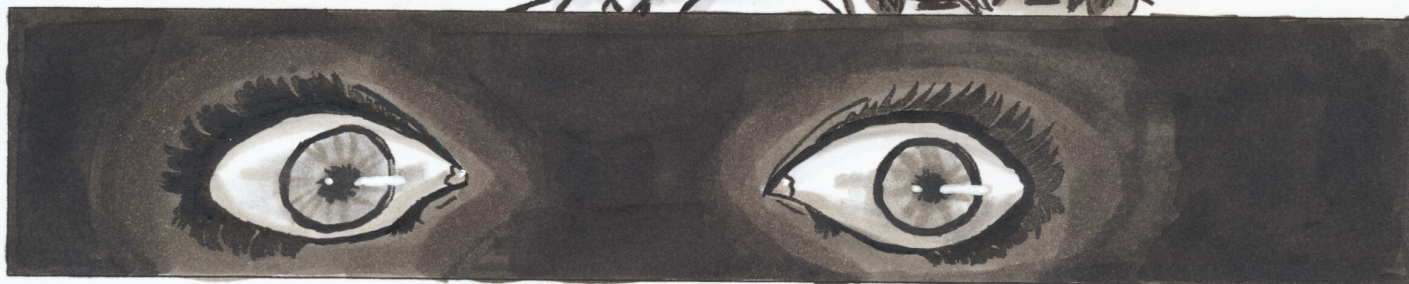
It's something that "holds characters and readers mostly in anxious suspense about threats to life, safety, and sanity kept largely out of sight or in shadows or suggestions from a hidden past."



So that's why some people say
the unknown is terrifying—not
horrifying.



I don't know... I
can't picture it.



Then think of this...

There's a sudden downpour of rain, and you seek shelter. There's an abandoned house right by. Its atmosphere is heavy, as if someone is slowly smothering you with a blanket. Do you just brave the rain? No! You enter the house like every actor in a B-rated horror film.

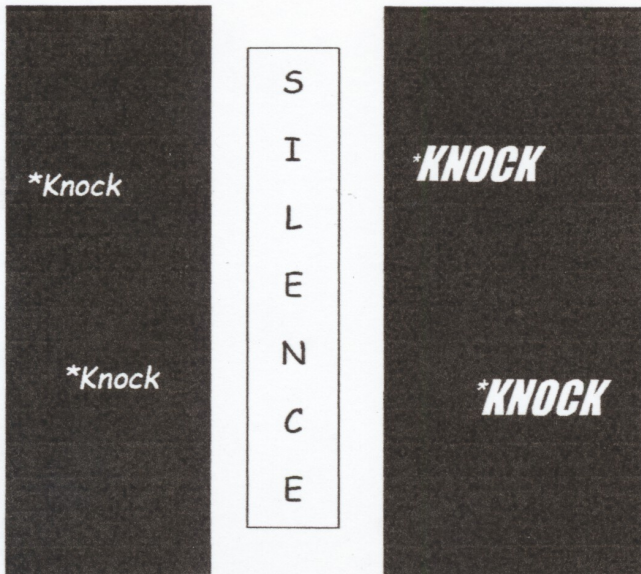
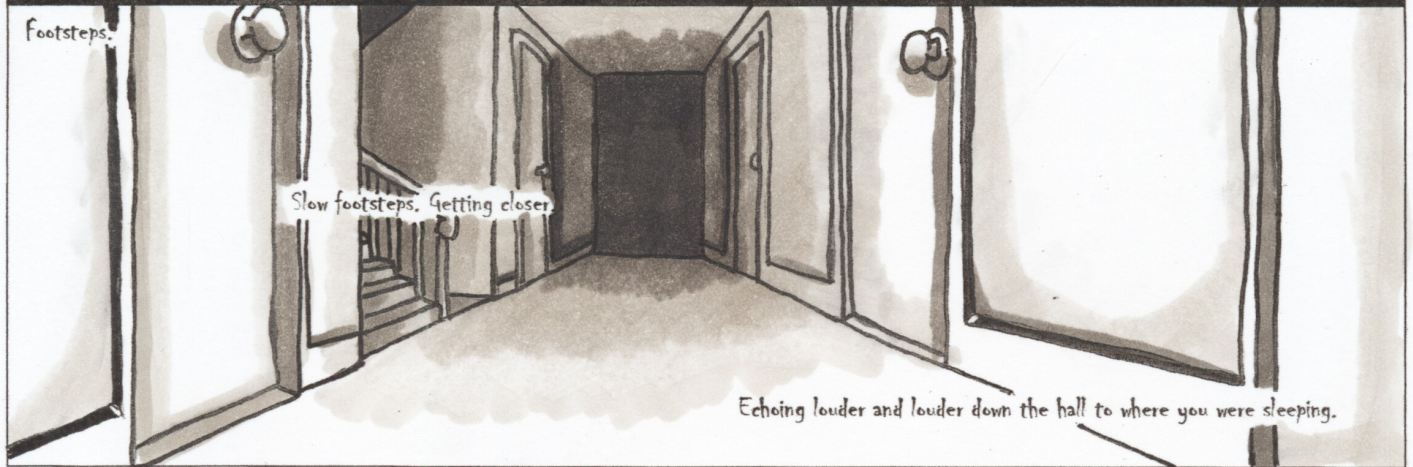


You walk up the creaky stairs, walk down the narrow hallway, and try to fall asleep on a dusty bed, despite all the red flags that should be going off in your mind.

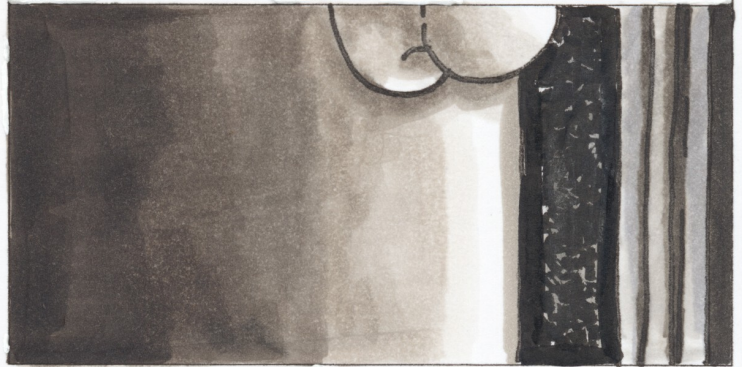


Hills, Matt. *The Pleasures of Horror*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Print.
Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy of Horror, Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
Moore, Terry. *Rachel Rising: The Shadow of Death*. Vol. 1. Houston, TX: Abstract Studio, 2012. Print.

But then...



It's not on your door, but it keeps getting closer ... and closer ... until you hear it next door. And then you hear it on your door, and your doorknob slowly turns



This is pure **terror**, because we are unaware of what is to come. The thing knocking on the doors becomes a source of primal fear.



But if the thing that knocks is revealed to be, say, a demon with glowing eyes and razor-like teeth... *that* is **horror**, because the unknown has been eliminated. This monster could have even been a bunny, and the story might still fit the **horror** genre.



As such, I will state that the **horror** genre of comics will “take its title from the emotion it characteristically or rather ideally promotes; this emotion constitutes the identifying mark of **horror**.” This means that the comic could include revolting images, era-specific phobias, or they could even drift away slightly from the clichés of **horror**.



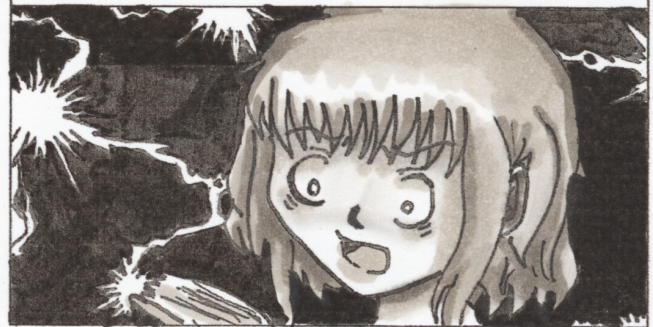
For example, in *Rachel Rising: The Shadow of Death*, one can see that Terry Moore does away with all the narration along with the iconic thought bubble only found in the comic format.



But what is included in a comic to make it “horrifying” and how does this differ from its literary equivalent?



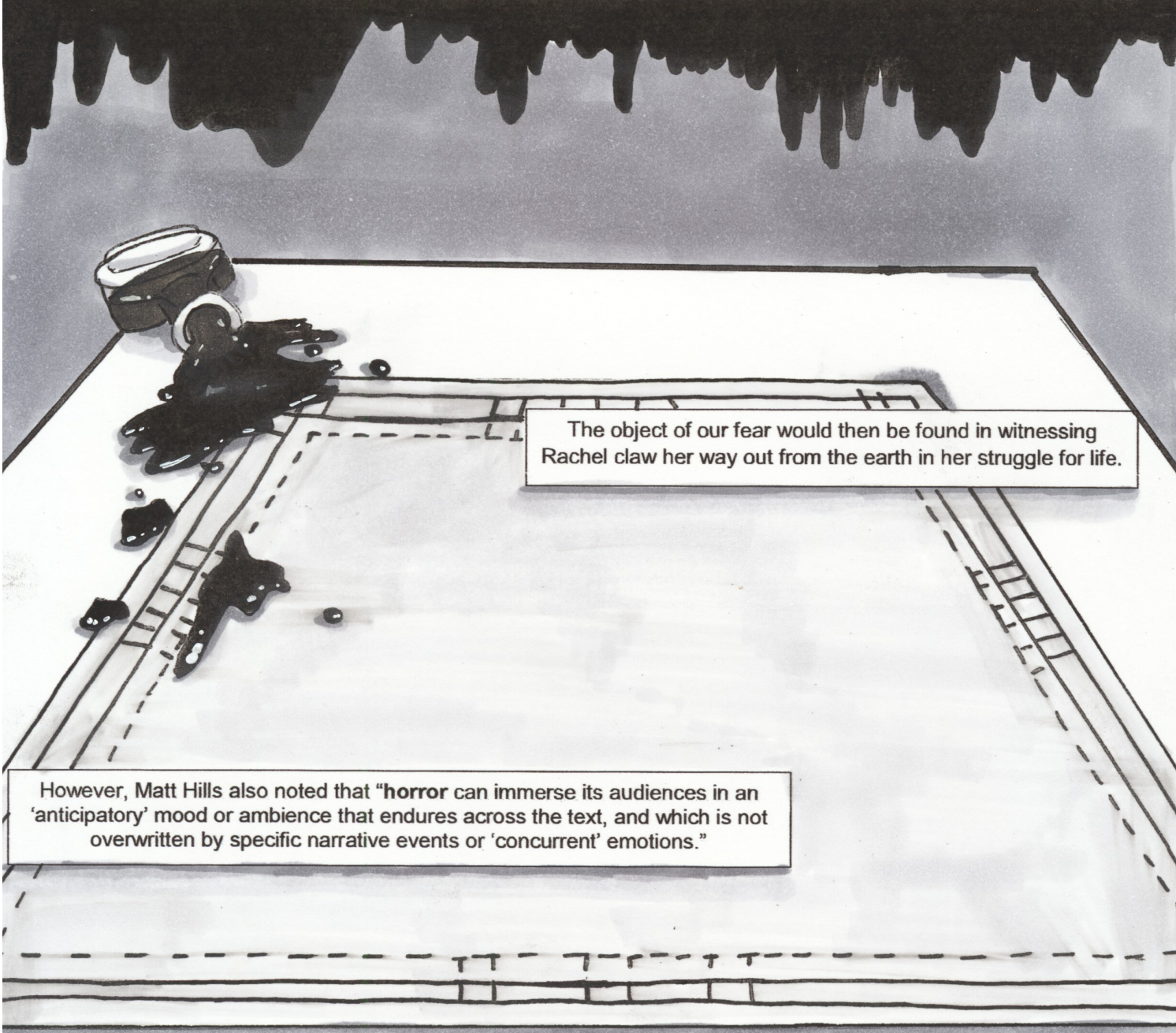
Put simply, a **horror** comic must create that suspenseful atmosphere and embody the realistic emotions of **horror** into the reader through both the images and the text. Unlike the written form, the images can either take away or give more connection to the reader with how the character is reacting to a horrifying image depending on what or how a technique is used.



Combined with the sketchy and tense line-work of his illustrations, as well as the with the black and white color scheme, a dark and suspenseful atmosphere is created. The readers cannot see ahead or predict the next action, similar to when one is watching a highly reviewed **horror** film in theaters for the first time.

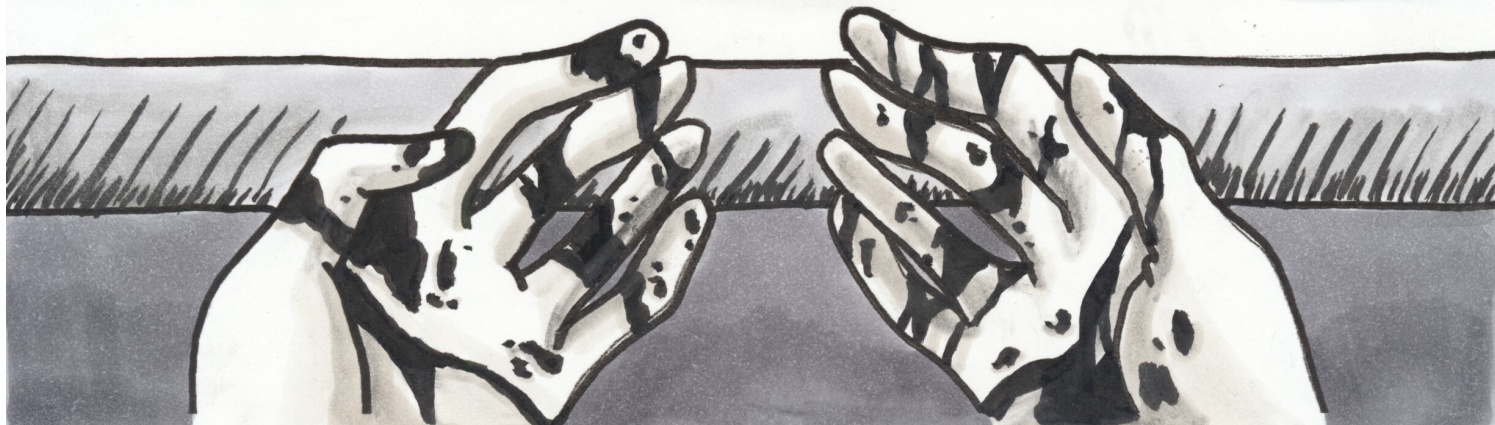


These stylistic techniques and his choice of panel layouts (such as transition choice or dark gutters) are meant to draw the reader in. As Matt Hills wrote in *The Pleasures of Horror*, this genre can follow the "cognitive theory itself, in which 'object-directed' audience emotions [are] provoked by the horror genre."



The object of our fear would then be found in witnessing Rachel claw her way out from the earth in her struggle for life.

However, Matt Hills also noted that "horror can immerse its audiences in an 'anticipatory' mood or ambience that endures across the text, and which is not overwritten by specific narrative events or 'concurrent' emotions."



This is effectively what Moore accomplished by through his comic's extended scenes that, at times, lacked both dialogue and narrative clues. Leaving the reader lost and confused about what is to come.



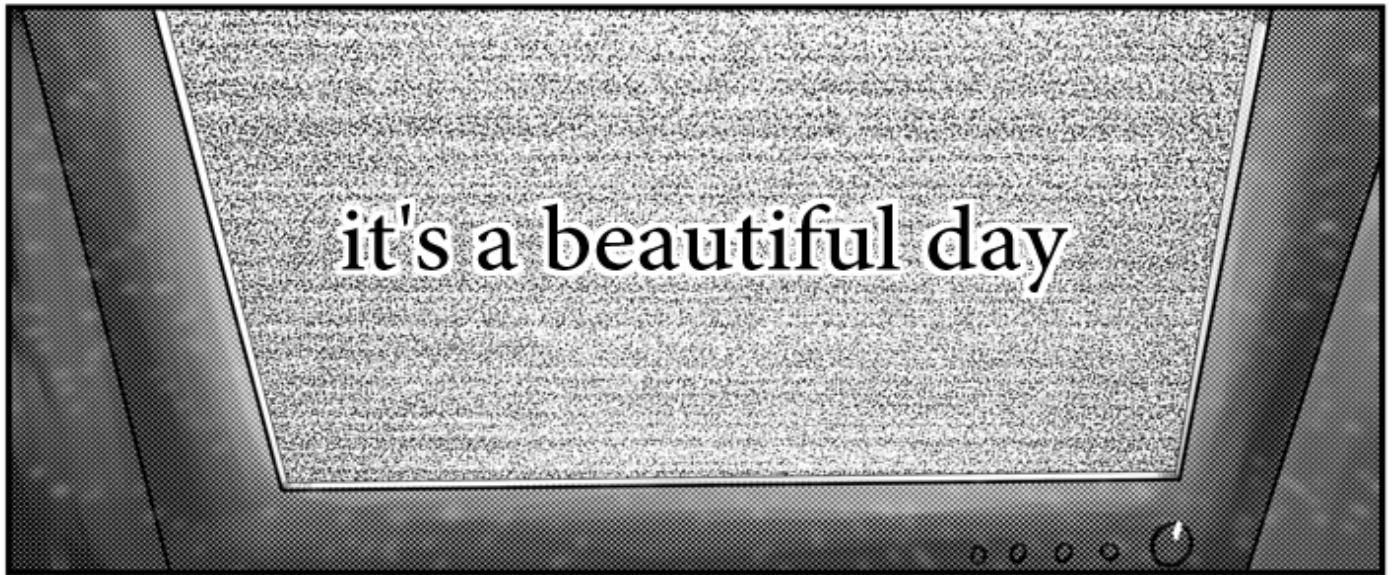
This is just one example of an artist's use of images in conjunction with the text to bring **horror** to the reader.



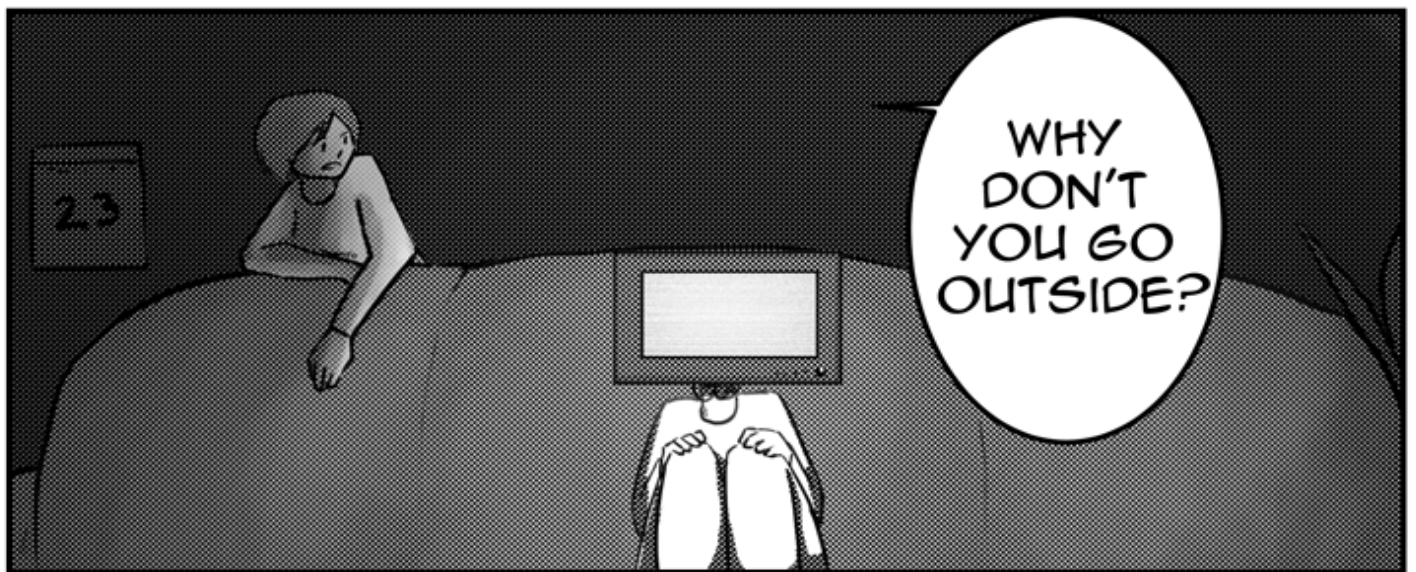
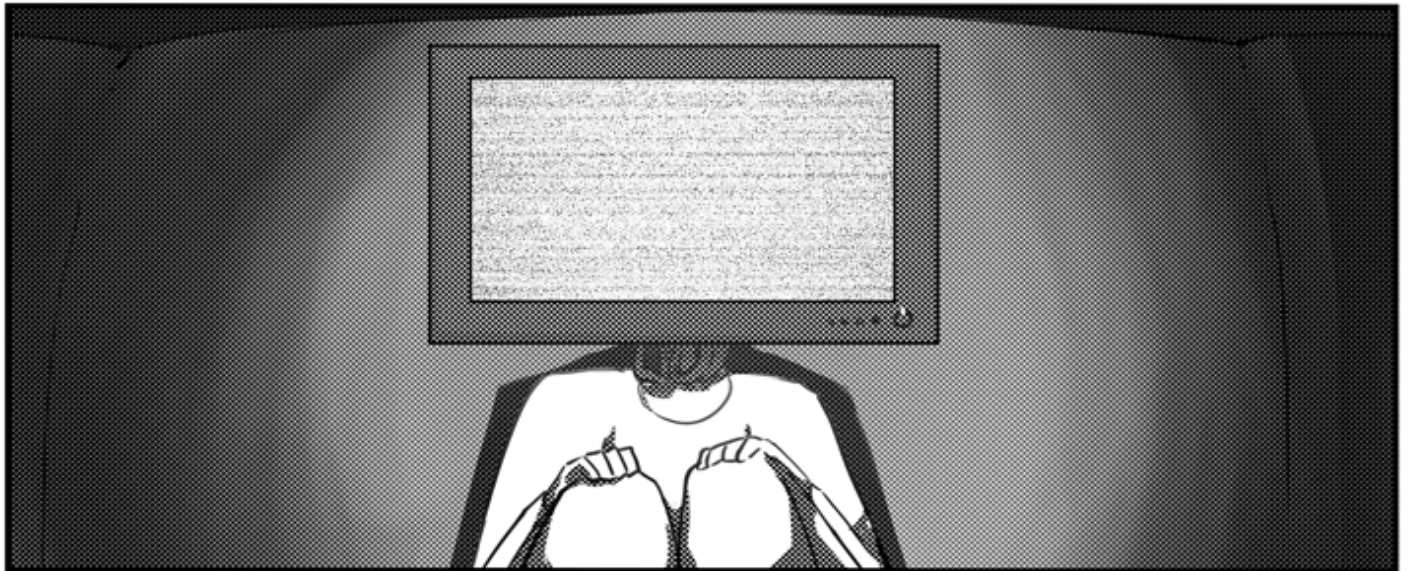
Not all these theories I have thrown your way are a cemented way to think about **horror**, and yet, as Matt Hills put it, "all such theories... appear to proceed from the basic notion that **horror**'s pleasures stand in need of explanation, whether this is done by relating **horror** texts to the 'real' cultural anxieties of a time period, or to transhistorical notions of the 'unconscious'."

Thus, what I did was simply define **horror** as a genre in the context of comics with regards to the techniques and common trends I have observed. Something you, the reader, can do as well the next time you dare turn the dial on the vault.



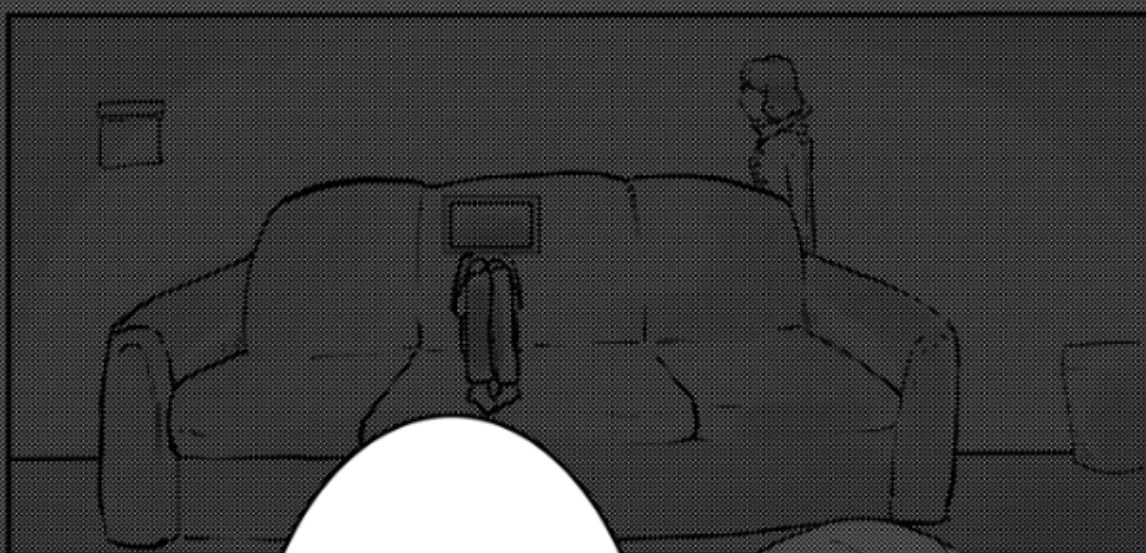
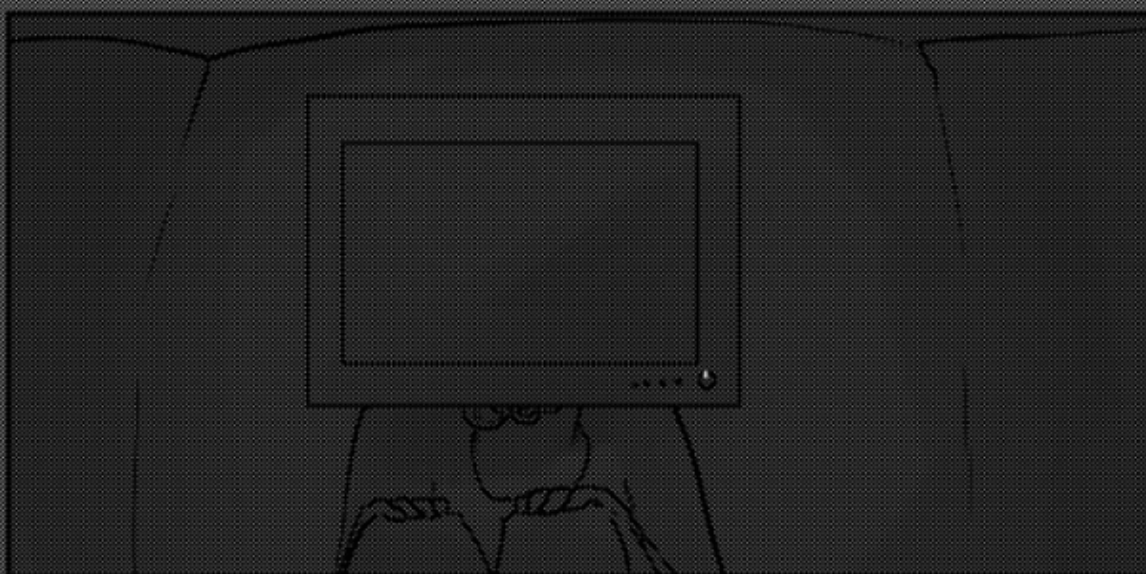


Story and art by: Katie Givens

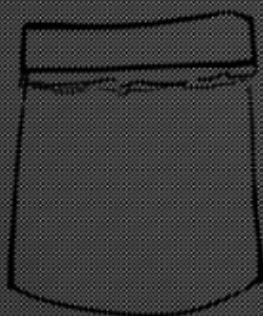


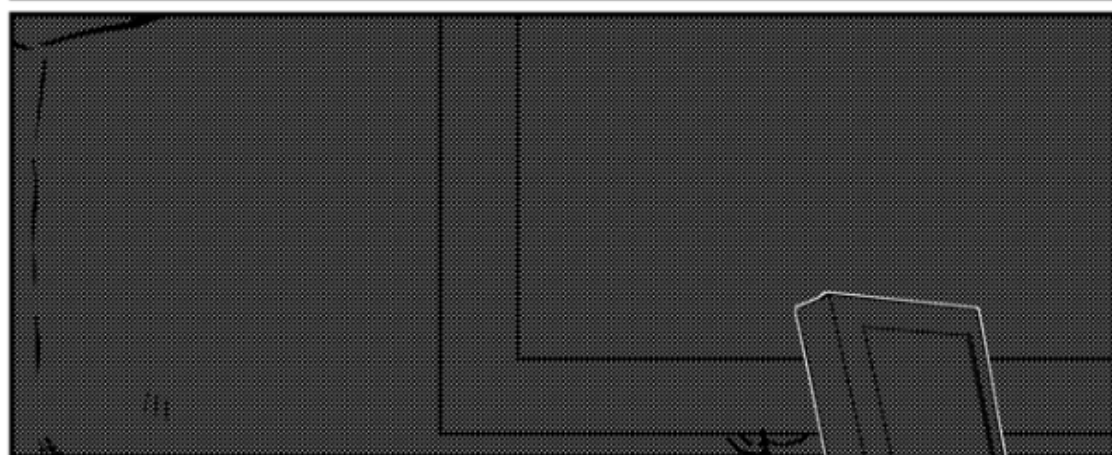
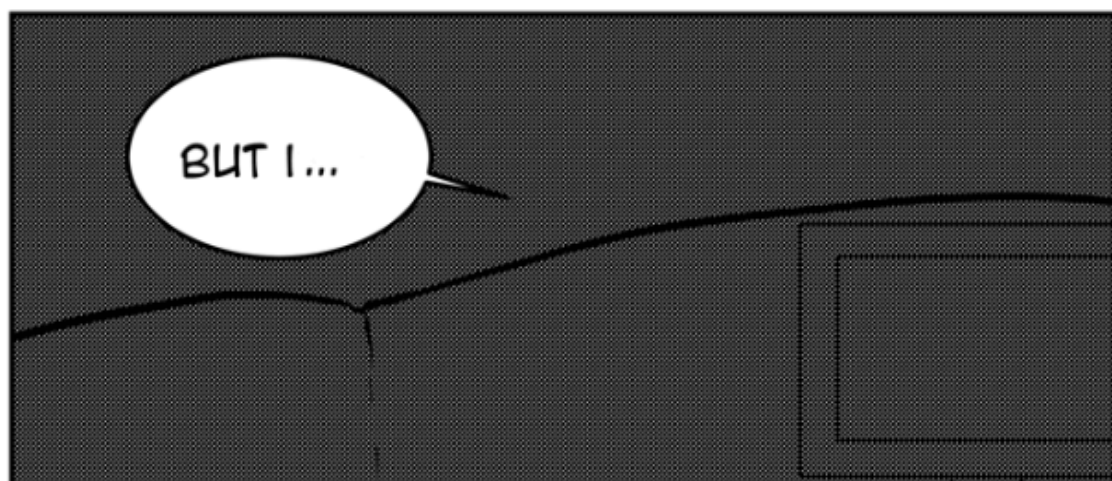


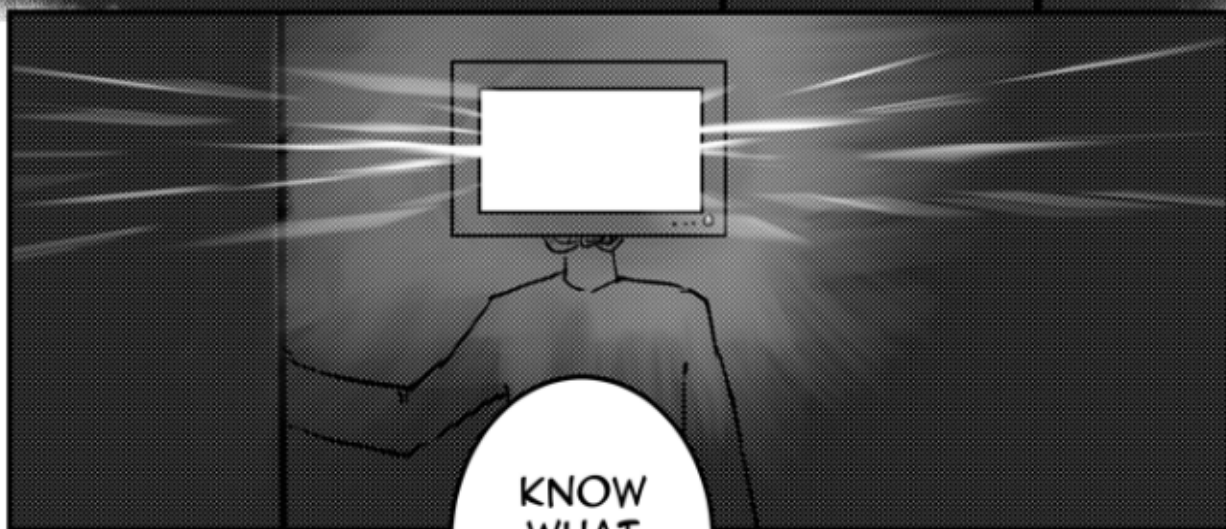




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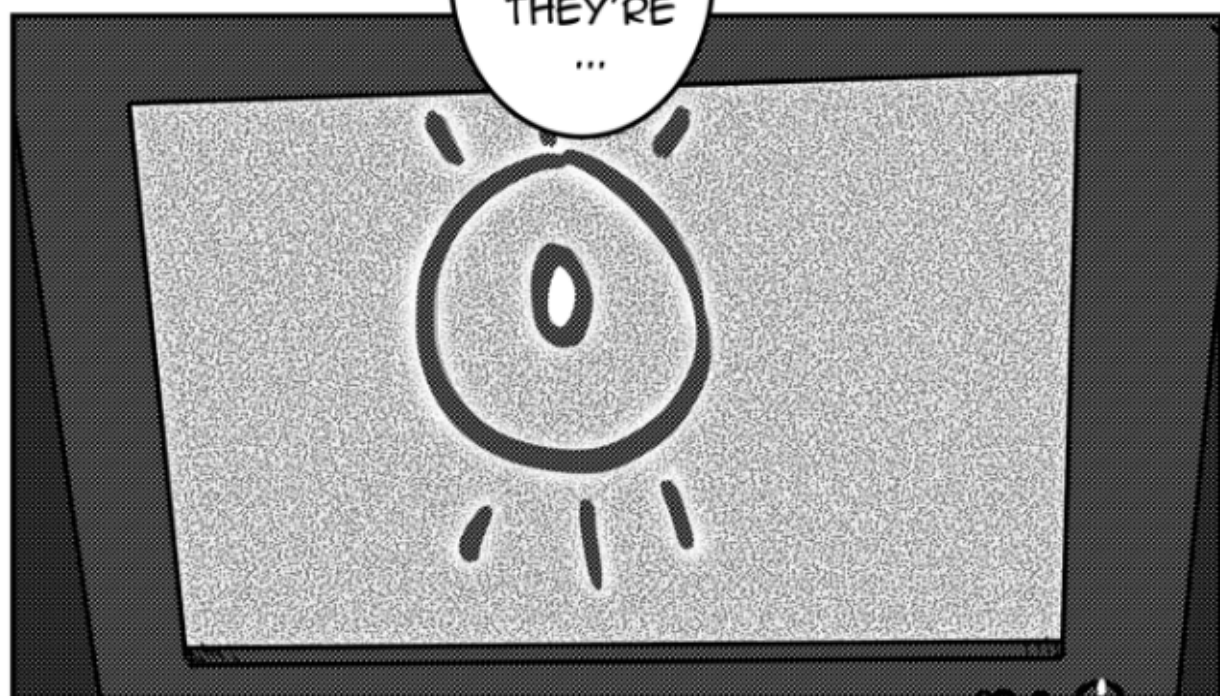






KNOW
WHAT
THEY'RE

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COLLEGE, CONCIOUSNESS, AND COMICS

An interview with Nick Sousanis

Nick Sousanis is the author of Unflattening, a dissertation which argues for the importance of visual thinking in teaching and learning. It is the first dissertation of its kind at Columbia University to be written entirely in comic book format. Sousanis is both an educator and a comic artist, bridging the gap between the comics and teaching worlds. He is currently teaching Comic Studies at the University of Calgary.

Art Ducko: How did you get into comics?

Nick Sousanis: I have a much older brother who read comics and read them to me, I'm one of those kids whose first word was "Batman". I think that reading comics definitely led to early literacy because I was reading pictures and words at the same time. In school I liked to draw so I made comics with my friends. For example, in junior high I made a comic, "Locker Man", which there's an image of in the dissertation. So yeah, that's how I started. It dwindled a little bit because I went to school for other things but then it came back.

AD: Can you name a few of your biggest influences in comics?

NS: The biggest two influences on the work as you see it are certainly Alan Moore and Scott McCloud. I am inspired by Moore's work and the way his images and text interacts with one another was really influential on me. His way of - I want to say, "four dimensional" - thinking about time and space in the comics form was really powerful to me as well. And then Scott McCloud's book, *Understanding Comics*, was like a bullet into what comics could be. Comics don't have to be this kind of thing or

that kind of thing, they can be all kinds of things. So when I did come back to comics my first efforts looked a little bit like the kind of things McCloud does and at the same time it looked a little like a piece Moore wrote and Melinda Gebbie illustrated called, *This is Information*. It was a 9/11 tribute book that was a comic about ideas and information done through visual and verbal metaphors. It did some of the things that McCloud's work did that I liked so much, but it got rid of the visible narrator and allowed you to really play with image, and that just really struck me.

AD: It sounds like a lot of that influenced your visual style. Was there any comic that made you think you could do a dissertation in that form?

"Even as I was doing it the work very much became this philosophical discussion about how we think, and how we learn, and how we teach."

NS: There was nothing that made me think I couldn't, you know? Certainly McCloud's work lends itself to that and Moore's work is so

smart. In the back notes from *From Hell* (by Alan Moore) there's that gullcatcher thing, which is a comic about the making of a comic. I think seeing that was like "yeah, this is like doing research". A lot of McCloud's work, and a few pieces of Moore's, are largely about ideas rather than stories, even if they are real stories. But I mean - I just thought there were so many serious comics out there that the argument had been won.

AD: Was there any point where you thought you were going to do the dissertation another way, like a formal dissertation, or was it always going to be a comic in your mind?

NS: When I came to school, I don't think I thought much about dissertations but I'd done some works in comics before that were educational in nature

and very complex and serious work. So when I came back I had a body of work and I said this is the kind of work I want to do, and the advisory board was into it, so then I just started doing it. I think at this point in history you still had to make the argument that it was okay to do, so even as I was doing it the work very much became this philosophical discussion about how we think, and how we learn, and how we teach. I know there were definitely some moments where I felt a little hesitation because no one else was doing anything like me and I thought, “Well, maybe I’m supposed to write some kind of thing that supports it”, but I didn’t want to and it didn’t make sense to. I had a dissertation proposal class and some of my colleagues said “Well, this is cool and all, but don’t you think you oughta write a text thing to explain it?”, and my repulsion to that idea really convinced me that I had to just do this and there was no hedging. If it counts, it has to count. So that was it, and I never looked back after that.

AD: In your book you describe unflattening as “a simultaneous engagement of multiple vantage points from which to engender new ways of seeing”, and then to illustrate that you reference many different philosophers and scientists. What was the research for that like and did you ever end up falling down the rabbit hole while looking into a specific concept or chasing an idea?

NS: Oh, always. I think rabbit holes is a great example; I went down tons of them. I feel like the visuals ask you to do things and you ask yourself, “How do I make this sequence work?”, or “How do these images fit with these images?”, and all of a sudden you need something that connects

to it. I think partly this is how I work in general; one thing makes me think of another, and it forces me to triangulate and to think of some other thing. If we looked at the book we could probably find lots of examples. Each time you start looking into something you find out things you don’t expect. Sometimes your intuition takes you places, sometimes drawing takes you places, and some days you just stumble onto things. It’s fun, and the fact that I didn’t place myself as the narrator meant that on each new page I had to invent what I was gonna draw, which means I was also inventing what I was gonna research. It’s not like I was working from nothing but it was like, “How do I get at this idea? Well, I get at this idea by looking into this, and looking into this”, and then that sends me somewhere else. So I think the very nature of working as open-ended as this, and then diving in, meant that rabbit holes happened all the time.

AD: When you started this research did you know how certain ideas were going to connect to each other or was that something that ended up happening afterwards?

NS: Yeah, I’d say both. If you look at the back of the

book, where the idea map of the whole thing is, you can see that a lot of these things I’ve thought about for a long time but I really struggled with how they all fit. There’s a bunch of ideas that I wanted to talk about and spent months and months trying to figure out how they fit, and then the outline actually came during one sleepless night. I sat down the next day and said, “this is where everything’s gonna go”, and some things still changed but for the most part those pieces started to fit together. But then with any chapter, all kinds of things showed up that I hadn’t planned to do. Like that whole eye motif that came from noticing that Eratosthenes,

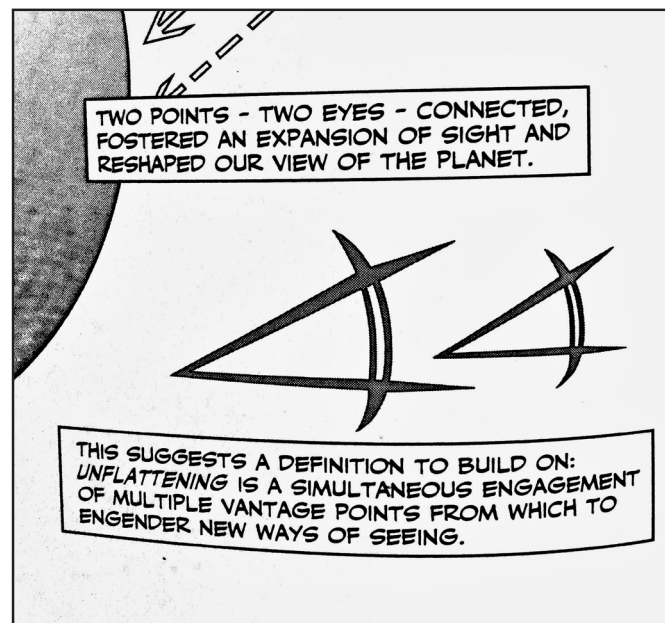


fig. 1

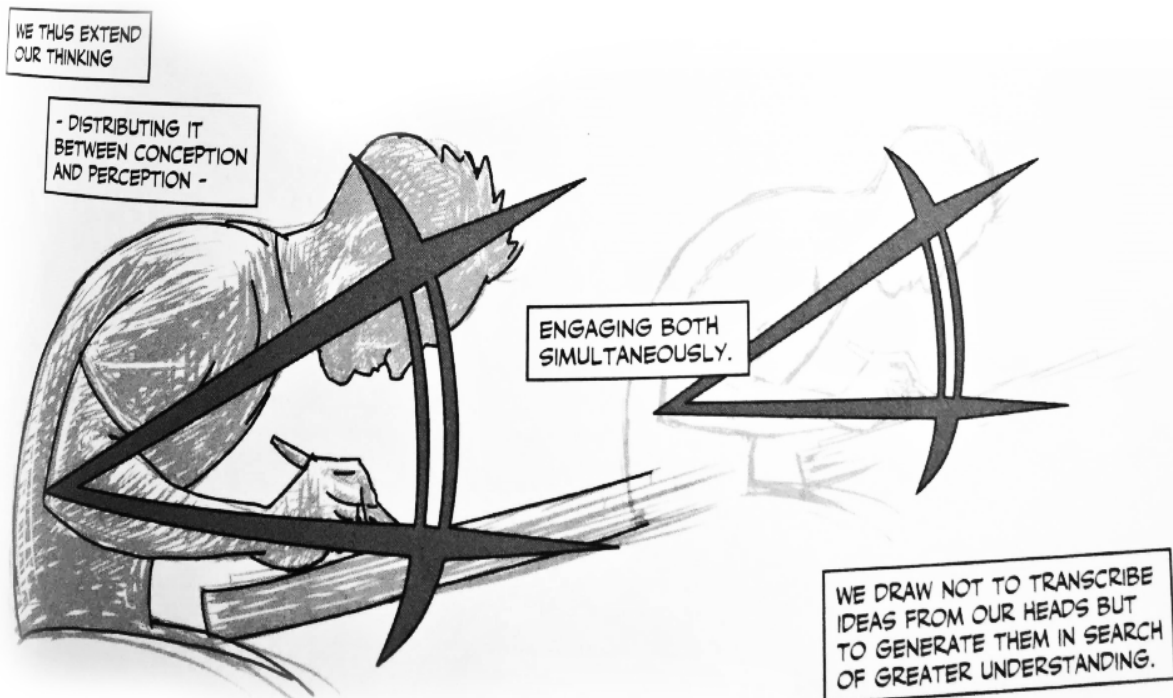


fig. 2

when he did that thing (fig 1) and it looked a little bit like an eye. And I think I had already thought about the idea of doors opening being sort of an “unflattening”, like you step through a door versus a door that’s closed and acts more as a wall. The whole idea of doorways as a place to take you somewhere, a sort of transformative thing, was key to me and as I started noticing those image connections then I started looking for more and inventing more. For example, the image of me drawing (fig 2), that’s also the eye motif. That was invented because at this point I had this established motif. So it’s a lot of back and forth.

AD: How much of your time was spent researching for the dissertation versus drawing the actual comic?

NS: I mean, I make very complicated drawings. Some of those take an extremely long time, but I probably spent more time figuring out of how all the pieces move, which goes hand in hand with the research. I probably spend maybe 75 percent of my time in the research/design phase with the actual drawing phase being the other 25 percent of my time, although it’s hard to draw a barrier between those two phases because they’re happening at the same time.

AD: Can I ask about the panel layout on page 37? You’ve mentioned in past discussions that while you were creating that page you were conscious of the fact that it can be somewhat difficult for the reader to figure out what order to read the text. I’ve read it through various different ways but I don’t think there was ever one way that was wrong.

NS: I like the way that chunking little bits of text allows that to happen, and I think that came together more in retrospect. What does it mean to force people to read backwards? Even if it’s very clear, what does it mean to go this way rather than that way? I mean this panel progression on page 36 is very linear, right (fig. 3)? And very boom boom boom boom. And it has this little tangent there which gets deflected and acts as a parenthetical, but it’s not confusing to read. For the most part I think page 37 is very straightforward but there are parts where you have to read upward, which is weird. I think with the exception of this, people probably read it correctly. This is where page 37 is supposed to start (fig. 4), and as you read there are a lot of choices. There’s a choice here (fig. 5) because I was aware that these two things were close to each other on the page and “new perspectives” and “a way of thinking” kind of spoke to each other. So I was okay with that mistake happening. Here’s an example of where ambiguity was very

intentional (fig.6), there's no punctuation so that you're forced to examine the image and text as a whole and then choose a path. Plus, it's talking about iteration which means it goes round and round just like the image does. This page is also talking about interdisciplinary learning, so if a discipline is a straight path then interdisciplinary curve around and weave in and out of each other. I mean I can see someone getting frustrated with that but for me the decision to do that was a way of answering the questions of "what does the shape of the idea look like?" and "how do I draw it like that, rather than just tell you about it?"

AD: Do you have any comics that you would recommend to help form a more "unflattened" perspective?

NS: First I'm going to take issue with that first word, "unflattened". I'm really careful to never turn it into an "-ed" because I think "unflattened" is something that's done and "unflattening" is supposed to mean something that's always ongoing. The whole thing about the "Ruts" chapter in the book is that it's easy to get stuck, even in our best ideas, because we stop thinking. So I don't think I can recommend anything that'll get you finished, but in terms of something that keeps you thinking - are these comics that have to do with my work or just comics that I think are worth reading? Because those are two different questions.

AD: True, would you mind answering both?

NS: I mean...things that tie into the work... my bibliography might be the, um...

Both: [Laughing]

NS: Okay, sorry ask me again and I'll try to be very serious.

AD: Can you recall any comics that you felt opened your point of view to new perspectives?

NS: I mean the idea of unflattening came to me really as a way of talking about how comics can

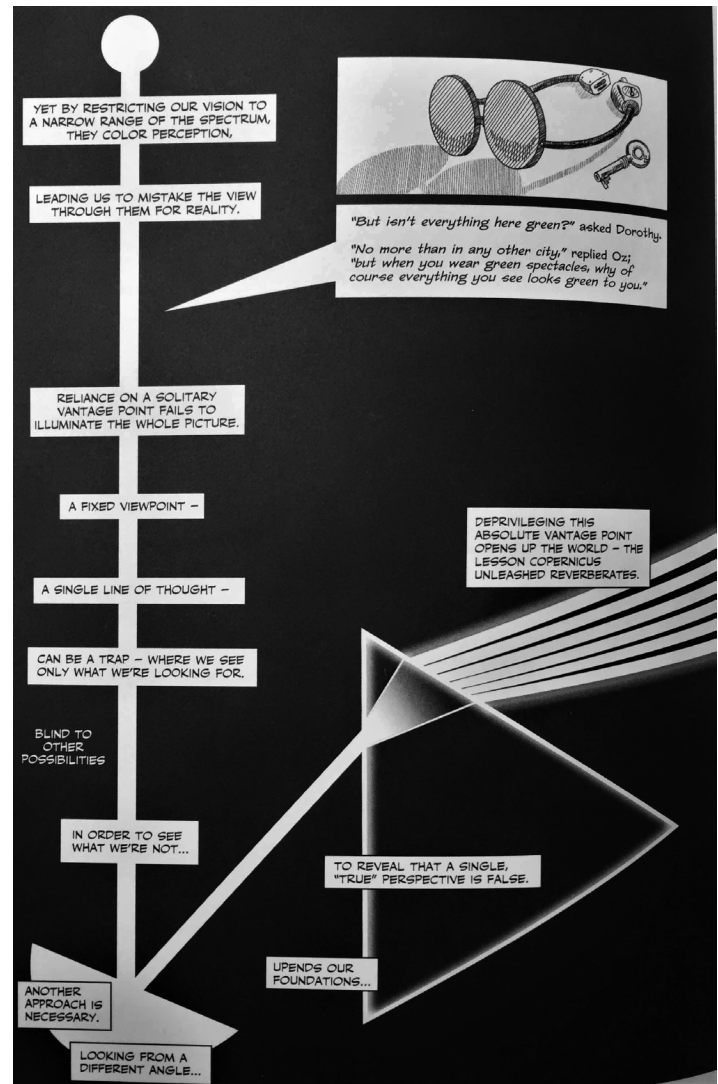


fig. 3

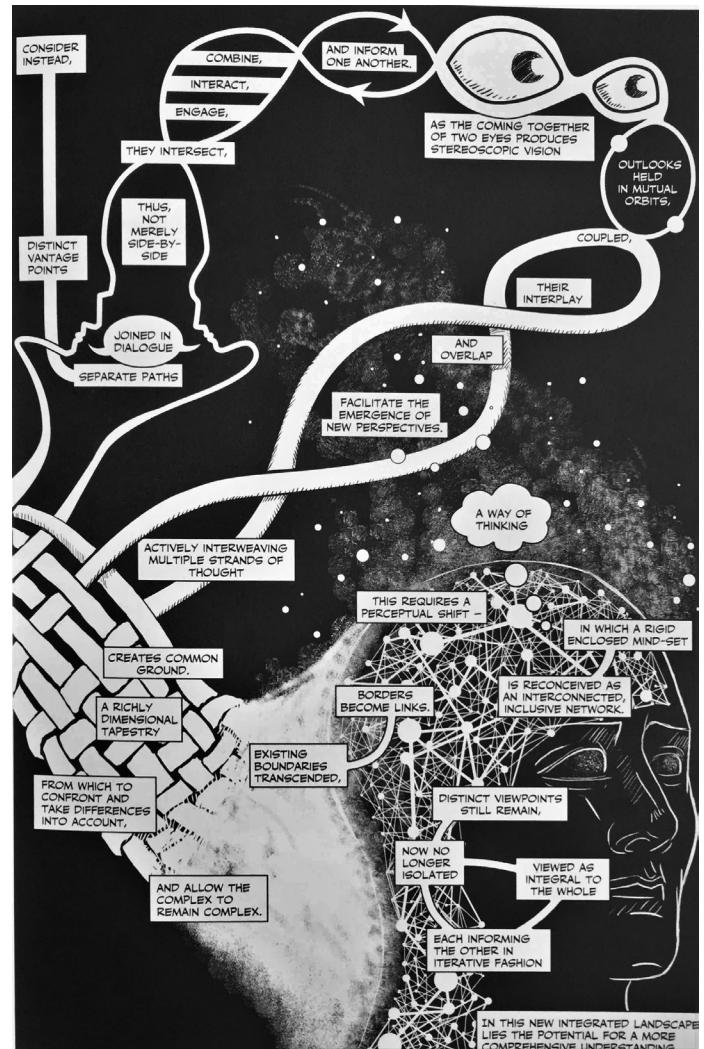
do more in a small static space than then print - how all of the sudden the comic can hold more ideas than it seems possible. That's really what I meant by unflattening and then it turned into all these other things. I think Frank Quitely's work really speaks to that because there's all these layered panels and there's so many things going on all at once but they're still readable. Chris Ware certainly is very similar in terms of the density of ideas and I think both of them are really influential in how I think about what comics can do.

AD: During one of your last talks at the University of Oregon you mentioned teaching a class about making comics. You had described people as drawers or non-drawers and mentioned something about non-drawers having a different approach to making comics, could you explain the reasoning for that?

NS: I've taught comics in reading classes and the comic class I'm doing at Calgary is called "Comics as a Way of Thinking". I try to clarify that non-drawers are self-described non-drawers because they tend to be the ones who say they aren't. I tend to think they are, but that's another story. Have you guys looked at Lynda Barry's work? She's a long time cartoonist but in the last few years she's released a few books about cartooning, drawing, and writing. The most recent is called *Syllabus*, which is about teaching a comics/drawing class for non-drawers and I used it in my class. She talks a lot about the excitement of seeing people who stopped drawing at six or seven start to pick it back up again because their skills are sort of caught back there but their ideas are somewhere else, so there's this explosion of just weirdness and experimentation. What's really exciting to me is to see self-described non-drawers start to rediscover and begin to get a sense of a different way of thinking that they have access to, but that they've forgotten. I think we tend to view drawing as like this special skill that "drawers" do. Like people who put things in museum walls or illustration books, they're drawers and everybody else isn't. I think instead, if you view it as a tool for how you think then different things can happen. I think one of the dangers that drawers fall into – and I think I've fallen into this myself – is falling back on existing skills because you're trained so much. I think drawers can probably produce more polished, finished work, but it may be a harder struggle to push themselves to think in new ways.

AD: Do you have any advice for people who are looking to get into comics, either as a creator or in a more academic sense?

NS: I think they should for sure read Scott McCloud's book, but they shouldn't stop there. I think there's so much comics scholarship going on now. For example, the Comics Studies minor here at the University of Oregon, and the head of that department, Ben Saunders' work – I mean once you start looking into scholarship on comics there's an explosion of people writing about race, gender, identity, and form, from all different perspectives



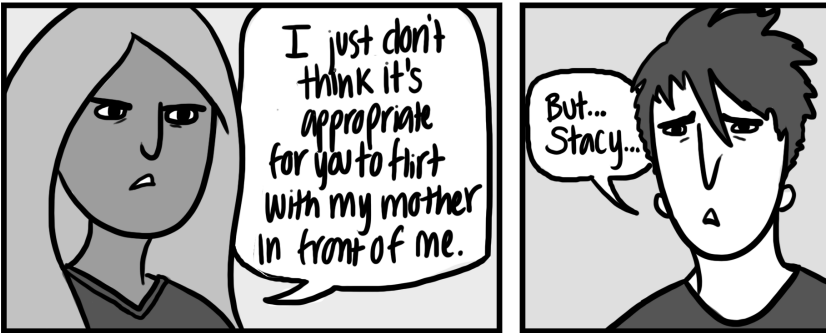
figures 4-6

and critical lenses. So I don't think there's any one source for that. But I think they should read comics, go to the graphic novel section at Barnes & Nobles, or whatever's left at the Duckstore, and grab things that you don't normally read, and then ask people for recommendations and then start there.

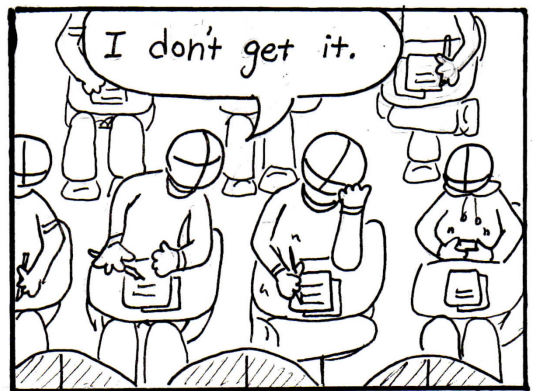
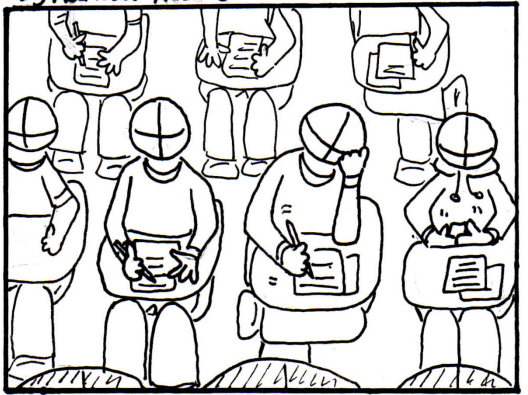
*Post-Script - Nick Sousanis has a recommended reading list on his website for those interested broadening their literary horizons and "unflattening" their perspectives:
<http://spinweaveandcut.com/>*

DEEP FRIED DUCK STRIPS

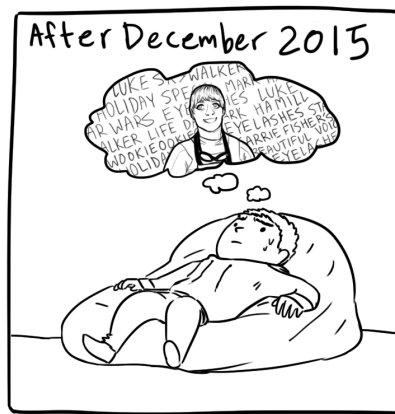
MEG QUINN



Lecture Hall
By Karissa Adams

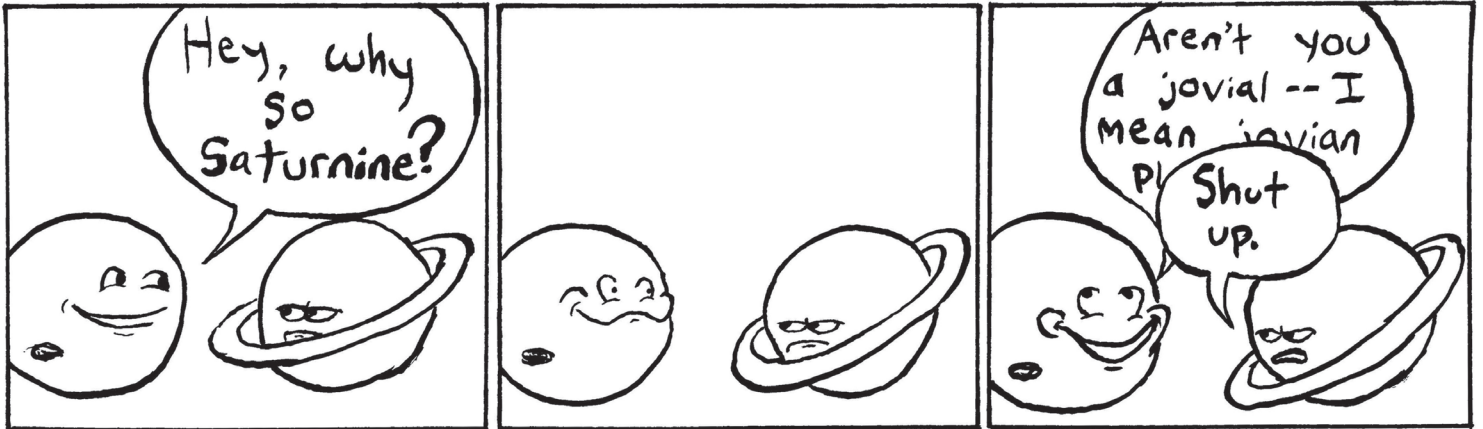


EMILY PRESTON





TYLER CRISSMAN



KERETH CURLISS



KERETH CURLISS

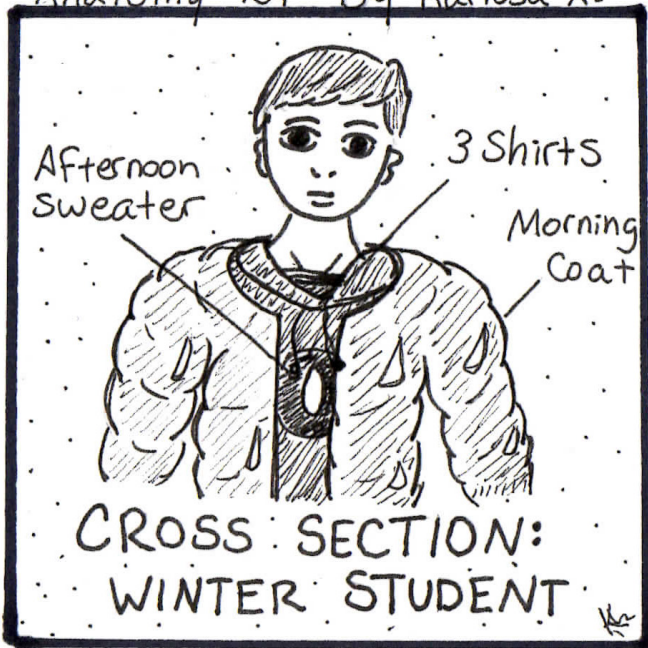




Why you should never take a yoga class with me in the winter:

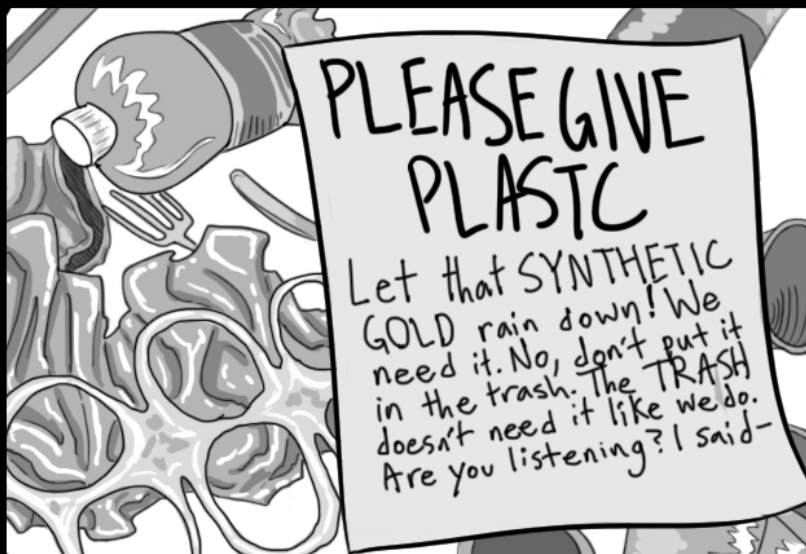


Anatomy 101 by Karissa A.



ALEX MILSHTAIN





VEGAN VEGETABLES

AND OTHER VEGAN STUFF

- Vegan fist-fights
- Vegan ennui
- Vegan emotional clumsiness
- Vegan juvenoia

AVAILABLE AT WHERE
EVER YOU ARE



MISSED CONNECTION

Campus squirrel. You had a giant nut, you shrieked at me and then chased me in front of a golf cart. I was crying. I hope we can start fresh.

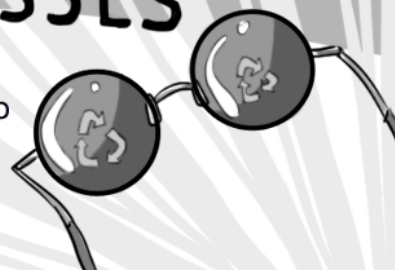


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